

BRANDON OF THE ENGINEERS

HAROLD BINDLOSS

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BRANDON OF THE ENGINEERS

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ALTON OF SOMASCO
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WINSTON OF THE PRAIRIE
THE GOLD TRAIL
SYDNEY CARTERET, RANCHER
A PRAIRIE COURTSHIP
VANE OF THE TIMBERLANDS
THE LONG PORTAGE
RANCHING FOR SYLVIA.
PRESCOTT OF SASKATCHEWAN
THE DUST OF CONFLICT
THE GREATER POWER
MASTERS OF THE WHEATLANDS
DELILAH OF THE SNOWS
BY RIGHT OF PURCHASE
THE CATTLE BARON'S DAUGHTER
THRICE ARMED
FOR JACINTA
THE INTRIGUERS
THE LEAGUE OF THE LEOPARD
FOR THE ALLISON HONOR
THE SECRET OF THE REEF
HARDING OF ALLENWOOD
THE COAST OF ADVENTURE
JOHNSTONE OF THE BORDER
BRANDON OF THE ENGINEERS

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"'YOU MUST COME. I CAN'T LET YOU LIVE AMONG THOSE PLOTTERS AND GAMBLERS.'"—*Page 224.*

BRANDON *of the* ENGINEERS

By HAROLD BINDLOSS

Author of "Johnstone of the Border," "Prescott of Saskatchewan," "Winston of the Prairie," etc.



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BRANDON OF THE ENGINEERS

CHAPTER I

A PROMISING OFFICER

THE lengthening shadows lay blue and cool beneath the alders by the waterside, though the cornfields that rolled back up the hill glowed a coppery yellow in the light of the setting sun. It was hot and, for the most part, strangely quiet in the bottom of the valley since the hammers had stopped, but now and then an order was followed by a tramp of feet and the rattle of chain-tackle. Along one bank of the river the reflections of the trees quivered in dark-green masses; the rest of the water was dazzlingly bright.

A pontoon bridge, dotted with figures in khaki, crossed a deep pool. At its head, where a white road ran down the hill, a detachment of engineers lounged in the shade. Their faces were grimed with sweat and dust, and some, with coats unbuttoned, sprawled in the grass. They had toiled hard through the heat of the day, and now were enjoying an "easy," until they should be called to attention when their work was put to the test.

As Lieutenant Richard Brandon stood where the

curve was boldest at the middle of the bridge, he had no misgivings about the result so far as the section for which he was responsible was concerned. He was young, but there was some ground for his confidence; for he not only had studied all that text-books could teach him but he had the constructor's eye, which sees half-instinctively where strength or weakness lies. Brandon began his military career as a prize cadet and after getting his commission he was quickly promoted from subaltern rank. His advancement, however, caused no jealousy, for Dick Brandon was liked. He was, perhaps, a trifle priggish about his work — cock-sure, his comrades called it — but about other matters he was naïvely ingenuous. Indeed, acquaintances who knew him only when he was off duty thought him something of a boy.

In person, he was tall and strongly made, with a frank, sunburned face. His jaw was square and when he was thoughtful his lips set firmly; his light-gray eyes were clear and steady. He was genial with his comrades, but usually diffident in the company of women and older men.

Presently the Adjutant came up and, stopping near, glanced along the rippling line that marked the curve of the bridge.

"These center pontoons look rather prominent, as if they'd been pushed upstream a foot or two," he remarked. "Was that done by Captain Maitland's order?"

"No, sir," Dick answered with some awkwardness. "For one thing, I found they'd lie steadier out of the eddy."

"They do, but I don't know that it's much of an

advantage. Had you any other reason for modifying the construction plans?"

Dick felt embarrassed. He gave the Adjutant a quick glance; but the man's face was inscrutable. Captain Hallam was a disciplinarian where discipline was needed, but he knew the value of what he called initiative.

"Well," Dick tried to explain, "if you notice how the wash of the head-rapid sweeps down the middle of the pool ——"

"I have noticed it," said the Adjutant dryly. "That's why the bridge makes a slight sweep. But go on."

"We found a heavy drag on the center that flattened the curve. Of course, if we could have pushed it up farther, we'd have got a stronger form."

"Why?"

"It's obvious, sir. If we disregard the moorings, a straight bridge would tend to curve downstream and open out under a shearing strain. As we get nearer the arch form it naturally gets stiffer, because the strain becomes compressive. After making the bridge strong enough for traffic, the problem is to resist the pressure of the current."

"True," the Adjutant agreed with a smile. "Well, we'll let the pontoons stand. The traditions of the British Army are changing fast, but while we don't demand the old mechanical obedience, it might be better not to introduce too marked innovations. Anyhow, it's not desirable that they should, so to speak, strike a commanding officer in the eye. Some officers are conservative and don't like that kind of thing."

He moved on and Dick wondered whether he had

said too much. He was apt to forget his rank and comparative unimportance when technical matters were discussed. In fact, it was sometimes difficult not to appear presumptuous; but when one knew that one was right ——

In the meantime, the Adjutant met the Colonel, and they stopped together at the bridge-head.

"I think we have made a good job, but the brigade's transport is pretty heavy," the Colonel remarked.

"I'm satisfied with the bridge, sir; very creditable work for beginners. If the other branches of the new armies are as good ——"

"The men are in earnest. Things, of course, are changing, and I suppose old-fashioned prejudices must go overboard. Personally, I liked the type we had before the war, but we'll let that go. Young Brandon strikes me as particularly keen."

"Keen as mustard," the Adjutant agreed. "In other ways, perhaps, he's more of the kind you have been used to."

"Now I wonder what you mean by that! You're something of what they're pleased to call a progressive, aren't you? However, I like the lad. His work is good."

"He *knows,* sir."

"Ah," said the Colonel, "I think I understand. But what about the drawings of the new pontoons? They must be sent to-night."

"They're ready. To tell the truth, I showed them to Brandon and he made a good suggestion about the rounding of the waterline."

The Colonel looked thoughtful.

"Well, the idea of a combined pontoon and light boat that would carry troops is by no means new; but these are rather an unusual type and if it were known that we were building them, it might give the enemy a hint. I suppose you told Brandon the thing's to be kept quiet."

"Yes; I made it plain," the Adjutant said, and they walked on.

Dick had been sitting on the bridge, but he jumped up as a rhythmic tramp of feet came down the hillside. Dust rose among the cornfields and hung in a white streak along the edge of a wood, and then with a twinkling flash of steel, small, ocher-colored figures swung out of the shadow. They came on in loose fours, in an unending line that wound down the steep slopes and reached the bridge-head. Then orders rolled across the stream, the line narrowed, and the measured tramp changed to a sharp uneven patter. The leading platoon were breaking step as they crossed the bridge. Dick frowned impatiently. This was a needless precaution. The engineers' work was good; it would stand the percussive shock of marching feet.

He stood at attention, with a sparkle in his eyes, as the hot and dusty men went by. They were, for the most part, young men, newly raised infantry, now being hardened and tempered until they were fit to be used as the army's spear-head in some desperate thrust for which engineers and artillery had cleared the way. It was some time before the first battalion crossed, but the long yellow line still ran back up the hillside to the spot at which it emerged from the deepening shade, and the next platoon took the bridge with unbroken step. It swayed and shook with a curious

regular tremble as the feet came down; but there was no giving way of tie and stringer-beam, and Dick forgot the men who were passing, and thought of fastenings and stressed material.

He was young and the pomp of war had its effect on him, but the human element began to take second place. Although an officer of the new army, he was first of all an engineer; his business was to handle wood and iron rather than men. The throb of the planks and the swing of the pontoons as the load passed over them fascinated him; and his interest deepened when the transport began to cross. Sweating, spume-flecked horses trod the quivering timber with iron-shod hoofs; grinding wheels jarred the structure as the wagons passed. He could feel it yield and bend, but it stood, and Dick was conscious of a strange, emotional thrill. This, in a sense, was his triumph; the first big task in which he had taken a man's part; and his work had passed the test. Taste, inclination, and interest had suddenly deepened into an absorbing love for his profession.

After a time, the Adjutant sent for him and held out a large, sealed envelope.

"These are the plans I showed you," he said. "Colonel Farquhar is driving to Newcastle, and will stop at Storeton Grange for supper at midnight. The plans must be delivered to him there. You have a motorcycle, I think?"

"Yes."

"Very well; it is not a long ride, but I'll release you from duty now. Don't be late at Storeton, take care of the papers, and get Colonel Farquhar's receipt."

There was a manufacturing town not far off, and Dick decided to go there and spend the evening with a cousin of his. They might go to a theater, or if not, Lance would find some means of amusing him. As a rule, Dick did not need amusing, but he felt that he must celebrate the building of the bridge.

Lance Brandon was becoming known as an architect, and he had a good deal of constructive talent. The physical likeness between him and Dick was rather marked, but he was older and they differed in other respects. Lance knew how to handle men as well as material, and perhaps he owed as much to this as to his artistic skill. His plans for a new church and the remodeling of some public buildings had gained him recognition; but he already was popular at country houses in the neighborhood and was courted by the leading inhabitants of the town.

Dick and he dined at the best hotel and Lance listened sympathetically to the description of the bridge. He was not robust enough for the army, but he hinted that he envied Dick; and Dick felt flattered. He sometimes bantered Lance about his social gifts and ambitions, but he had never resented the favors his father had shown his cousin. Lance had been left an orphan at an early age and the elder Brandon — a man of means and standing — had brought him up with his son. They had been good friends and Dick was pleased when his father undertook to give Lance a fair start at the profession he chose. He imagined that now Lance was beginning to make his mark, his allowance had stopped, but this was not his business. Lance was a very good sort, although he was clever in ways that Dick was not and indeed rather despised.

"What shall we do next?" Dick asked when they had lounged for a time in the smoking-room.

Lance made a gesture of resignation as he stretched himself in a big chair. He was dressed with quiet taste, his face was handsome but rather colorless, and his movements were languid.

"You're such an energetic beggar," he complained. "The only theater where they put on plays worth seeing is closed just now, but there's a new dancer at the nearest hall and we might look in. I hope my churchwarden patrons won't disapprove if they hear of it, because they talk about building an ornamental mission room."

Dick laughed.

"They wouldn't find fault with you. Somehow, nobody does."

"There's some truth in that; the secret is that I know when to stop. One can enjoy life without making the pace too hot. People aren't really censorious, and even the narrow-minded sort allow you certain limits; in fact, I imagine they rather admire you if you can play with fire and not get singed. Women do, anyhow; and, in a sense, their judgment's logical. The thing that doesn't hurt you can't be injurious, and it shows moderation and self-control if you don't pass the danger line."

"How do you know when you have come to the line?"

"Well," smiled Lance, "experience helps; but I think it's an instinct. Of course, if you do show signs of damage, you're done for, because then the people who envied you throw the biggest stones."

"Let's start," said Dick. "I'm not much of a

philosopher. Building bridges and digging saps is good enough for me."

"They're healthy occupations, so long as you don't get shot; but, considering everything, it's strange that they still monopolize your interest."

Dick colored. He knew what his cousin meant. He had been attracted by a girl of whom his father approved and who was well-bred, pretty, and rich. Dick imagined that his father's views were agreeable to Helen's relatives and that she was not ignorant of this. Still, nothing had been actually arranged, and although he admired Helen, it would be time enough to think of marriage when he was a captain, for instance.

"Pontoons and excavations have their charm for men with constructive tastes," Lance went on; "but you may find later that they don't satisfy all your needs."

"Get your hat!" Dick returned with a smile, jumping up as he spoke.

The music-hall was badly filled. The audience seemed listless and the performance dragged. Even the much-praised dancer was disappointing, and there was an unusual number of shabby loungers in the bar. Dick had come prepared to enjoy himself after a day of arduous work, and by way of doing so, he ordered a drink or two that he did not really want. As a rule, he was abstemious, but the hall was very hot. It struck him as glaring and tawdry after the quiet dale where the water sparkled among the stones; and the pallid loungers with their stamp of indulgence differed unpleasantly from the hard, brown-faced men he led.

"Let's clear out," he said at last. "Is there anywhere else to go?"

"My rooms," Lance suggested.

"Oh, I want something fresh to-night," Dick replied with a smile.

Lance pondered.

"Well, I can show you some keen card-play and perhaps a clever game of billiards, besides a girl who's a great deal prettier than the dancer. But it's four miles out of town."

Dick glanced at his watch.

"I can take you on the carrier," he said. "I've plenty of time yet."

They set off, and presently stopped at a tall iron gate on the edge of a firwood. A glimmer of lights indicated that a house stood at the end of the drive.

"Kenwardine will be glad to receive you as a friend of mine," Lance said; "and you needn't play unless you like. He's fond of company and generally has a number of young men about the place."

"A private gambling club?"

"Oh, no. You're very far from the mark. Kenwardine certainly likes a bet and sometimes runs a bank, but all he wins wouldn't do much to keep up a place like this. However, you can see for yourself."

Dick was not a gambler and did not play many games, but he wanted a little excitement, and he looked forward to it as he followed his cousin up the drive.

CHAPTER II

DICK'S TROUBLES BEGIN

IT was with mixed feelings that Clare Kenwardine got down from the stopping train at a quiet station and waited for the trap to take her home. The trap was not in sight, but this did not surprise her, for nobody in her father's household was punctual. Clare sometimes wondered why the elderly groom-gardener, whose wages were very irregularly paid, stayed on, unless it was because his weakness for liquor prevented his getting a better post; but the servants liked her father, for he seldom found fault with them. Kenwardine had a curious charm, which his daughter felt as strongly as anybody else, though she was beginning to see his failings and had, indeed, been somewhat shocked when she came home to live with him not long before.

Now she knitted her level brows as she sat down and looked up the straight, white road. It ran through pastures, and yellow cornfields where harvesters were at work, to a moor on which the ling glowed red in the fading light. Near the station a dark fir-wood stretched back among the fields and a row of beeches rose in dense masses of foliage beside the road. There was no sound except the soft splash of a stream. Everything was peaceful; but Clare was young, and tranquillity was not what she desired.

She had, indeed, had too much of it in the sleepy cathedral town she had left.

Her difficulty was that she felt drawn in two different ways; for she had inherited something of her father's recklessness and love of pleasure, though her mother, who died when Clare was young, had been a shy Puritan. Clare was kept at school much longer than usual; and when she insisted on coming home she found herself puzzled by her father's way of living. Young men, and particularly army officers, frequented the house; stylish women came down from town, often without their husbands; and there was generally some exciting amusement going on. This had its attraction for Clare; but her delicate refinement was sometimes offended, and once she was even alarmed. One of the young men had shown his admiration for her in a way that jarred, and soon afterward there had been a brawl over a game of cards.

Kenwardine had then suggested that she make a long visit to her aunts, in the cathedral town. They had received her gladly but she soon found her stay there irksome. The aunts were austere, religious women, who moved in a narrow groove and ordered all their doings by a worn-out social code. Still, they were kind and gave Clare to understand that she was to stay with them always and have no more to do with Kenwardine than duty demanded. The girl rebelled. She shrank with innate dislike from license and dissipation, but the life her aunts led was dreary, and she could not give up her father. Though inexperienced, she was intelligent and she saw that her path would not be altogether smooth now that she was going home for good. While she thought about it, the trap arrived

and the shabby groom drove her up the hill with confused apologies.

An hour or two after Clare reached home, Lance and Dick Brandon entered the house and were met by Kenwardine in the hall. He wore a velvet jacket over his evening clothes and Dick noticed a wine-stain on the breast. He was thin, but his figure was athletic, although his hair was turning gray and there were wrinkles about his eyes.

"Very glad to see your cousin," he said to Lance, and turned to Dick with a smile. "Soldiers have a particular claim on our hospitality, but my house is open to anybody of cheerful frame of mind. One must relax now and then in times like these."

"That's why I brought Dick," Lance replied. "He believes in tension. But I wonder whether your notion of relaxing is getting lax?"

"There's a difference, though it's sometimes rather fine," Kenwardine answered with a twinkle. "But come in and amuse yourselves as you like. If you want a drink, you know where to find it."

They played a game of billiards and then went into another room, where Dick lost a sovereign to Kenwardine. After that, he sat in a corner, smoking and languidly looking about, for he had been hard at work since early morning. Two or three subaltern officers from a neighboring camp stood by the table, besides several other men whose sunburned faces indicated a country life. The carpets and furniture were getting shabby, but the room was large and handsome, with well-molded cornices and paneled ceiling. The play was not high and the men were quiet, but the room was filled with cigar smoke and there was a smell of

liquor. Dick did not object to drink and gambling in moderation, though it was seldom that he indulged in either. He found no satisfaction in that sort of thing, and he now felt that some of Kenwardine's friends would do better to join the new armies than to waste their time as they were doing.

At last Kenwardine threw down the cards.

"I think we have had enough for a time," he said. "Shall we go into the music-room, for a change?"

Dick followed the others, and looked up with surprise when Clare came in. Lance had spoken of a pretty girl, but she was not the type Dick had expected. She wore a very plain white dress, with touches of blue that emphasized her delicate coloring. Her hair was a warm yellow with deeper tones, her features were regular and well-defined, and Dick liked the level glance of her clear, blue eyes. He thought they rested on him curiously for a moment. She had Kenwardine's slender, well-balanced figure, and her movements were graceful, but Dick's strongest impression was that she was out of place. Though perfectly at ease, she did not fit into her environment: she had a freshness that did not harmonize with cigar smoke and the smell of drink.

Clare gave him a pleasant smile when he was presented, and after speaking to one or two of the others she went to the piano when Kenwardine asked her to sing. Dick, who was sitting nearest the instrument, stooped to take a bundle of music from a cabinet she opened.

"No," she said; "you may put those down. I'm afraid we have nothing quite so good, and perhaps

it's silly, but I've fallen back on our own composers since the fourth of August."

Dick spread out the music, to display the titles.

"These fellows have been dead some time," he argued humorously. "They'd probably disown their descendants if they'd survived until now. But here's a Frenchman's work. They're on our side, and his stuff is pretty good, isn't it?"

Clare smiled.

"Yes," she said, "it's certainly good; but I'd rather sing something English to-night."

She began a patriotic ballad Dick knew and liked. He was not much of a musician, but his taste was good. The song rang true; it was poetry and not warlike jingle, but he had not heard it sung so well before. Clare's voice had been carefully trained and she used it well, but he knew that she had grasped the spirit of the song. One or two of the men who had been sitting got up, two young subalterns stood very stiff and straight, but Dick noted that Kenwardine did not change his lounging attitude. He was smiling, and Lance, glancing at him, looked amused. Dick remembered this afterward, but he now felt that Lance was not quite showing his usual good form.

When the song was finished, Dick turned to Clare. He wanted to begin talking to her before anybody else came up.

"It was very fine. I don't understand the technique of music, but one felt that you got the song just right. And then, the way you brought out the idea!"

"That is what the mechanical part is for," she an-

swered with a smile and a touch of color. "As it happens, I saw an infantry brigade on the march to-day, and watched the long line of men go by in the dust and sun. Perhaps that helps one to understand."

"Did you see them cross the bridge?" Dick asked eagerly.

"No," she answered; and he felt absurdly disappointed. He would have liked to think that his work had helped her to sing.

"Have you another like the first?" he asked.

"I never sing more than once," she smiled. Then as Lance and another man came toward them, she added, glancing at an open French window: "Besides, the room is very hot. It would be cooler in the garden."

Dick was not a man of affairs, but he was not a fool. He knew that Clare Kenwardine was not the girl to attempt his captivation merely because he had shown himself susceptible. She wanted him to keep the others off, and he thought he understood this as he glanced at Lance's companion. The fellow had a coarse, red face and looked dissipated, and even Lance's well-bred air was somehow not so marked as usual. Well, he was willing that she should make any use of him that she liked.

They passed the others, and after stopping to tell Kenwardine that she was going out, Clare drew back a curtain that covered part of the window. Dick stepped across the ledge and, seeing that the stairs below were iron and rather slippery, held out his hand to Clare. The curtain swung back and cut off the light, and when they were near the bottom the girl

tripped and clutched him. Her hand swept downward from his shoulder across his chest and caught the outside pocket of his coat, while he grasped her waist to steady her.

"Thank you," she said. "I was clumsy, but the steps are awkward and my shoes are smooth."

Dick was glad it was dark, for he felt confused. The girl had rested upon him for a moment and it had given him a thrill.

They crossed the broad lawn. Half of it lay in shadow, for a wood that rolled up a neighboring hillside cut off the light of the low, half moon. The air was still, it was too warm for dew, and there was a smell of flowers — stocks, Dick thought, and he remembered their pungent sweetness afterward when he recalled that night. Clare kept in the moonlight, and he noted the elusive glimmer of her white dress. She wore no hat or wrap, and the pale illumination emphasized the slenderness of her figure and lent her an ethereal grace.

They stopped at a bench beneath a copper-beech, where the shadow of the leaves checkered with dark blotches the girl's white draperies and Dick's uniform. Some of the others had come out, for there were voices in the gloom.

"Perhaps you wonder why I brought you here," Clare said frankly.

"No," Dick answered. "If you had any reason, I'm not curious. And I'd rather be outside."

"Well," she said, "the light was rather glaring and the room very hot." She paused and added: "Mr. Brandon's your cousin?"

"He is, and a very good sort. He brought me

to-night, but I felt that it was, perhaps, something of an intrusion when you came in."

"You didn't feel that before?"

Dick knew that he was on dangerous ground. He must not admit that he suspected Kenwardine's motive for receiving promiscuous guests.

"Well, not to the same extent. You see, Lance knows everybody and everybody likes him. I thought I might be welcome for his sake."

"It's plain that you are fond of your cousin. But why did you imagine that I should think your visit an intrusion?"

Dick was glad he sat in the shadow, for his face was getting hot. He could not hint that he had expected to find a rather daring coquette — the kind of girl, in fact, one would imagine a semi-professional gambler's daughter to be. It now seemed possible that he had misjudged Kenwardine; and he had certainly misjudged Clare. The girl's surroundings were powerless to smirch her: Dick was sure of that.

"Oh, well," he answered awkwardly, "although Lance obviously knows your father pretty well, it doesn't follow that he's a friend of yours."

"It does not," she said in a curious tone. "But do you know the man he was with?"

"I never saw him before, and somehow I don't feel anxious to improve his acquaintance."

Clare laughed.

"That's a quick decision, isn't it? Are you a judge of character?" she asked.

"I have been badly mistaken," Dick admitted with a smile. "Still, I know the people I'm going to like.

How is it I haven't seen you about? We're not very far off and most of the people in the neighborhood have driven over to our camp."

"I only came home to-night, after being away for some time."

Dick was relieved to learn this. He did not like to think of her living at Kenwardine's house and meeting his friends. It was scarcely half an hour since he met Clare Kenwardine, but she had, quite unconsciously he thought, strongly impressed him. In fact, he felt rather guilty about it. Since he was, in a manner, expected to marry some one else, he had no business to enjoy yielding to this stranger's charm and to thrill at her touch.

They sat in silence for a few moments, and then Lance strolled up with his companion.

"Don't forget the time, Dick," he remarked as he passed. "You mustn't let him keep you too long, Miss Kenwardine. He has an important errand to do for his colonel."

"If you don't mind, I won't go just yet," Dick said to Clare; and understood from her silence that she did not want to dismiss him.

For the first time since they were boys, he was angry with his cousin. It looked as if Lance had meant to take him away when Miss Kenwardine needed him. He was flattered to think she preferred his society to the red-faced man's, and had used him to keep the other at a distance. Well, he would stay to the last minute and protect her from the fellow, or from anybody else.

A little later Kenwardine joined them, and Dick

knew that he must go. Clare gave him her hand with a quick, grateful look that made his heart beat, and Lance met him as he went into the house.

"You're cutting it very fine," he said. "Come along; here's your cap."

"In a moment! There's an infantry man I asked over to our camp."

"You haven't time to look for him," Lance answered, and good-humoredly pushed Dick into the hall. "Get off at once! A fellow I know will give me a lift home."

Dick ran down the drive and a few moments later his motorcycle was humming up the road. He sped through a dark firwood, where the cool air was filled with resinous scent, and out across a hillside down which the stooked sheaves stood in silvery rows, but he noticed nothing except that the white strip of road was clear in front. His thoughts were back in the garden with Clare Kenwardine, and he could smell the clogging sweetness of the stocks. This was folly, and he changed the gear on moderate hills and altered the control when the engine did not need it, to occupy his mind; but the picture of the girl he carried away with him would not be banished.

For all that, he reached Storeton Grange in time and, running up the drive, saw lights in the windows and a car waiting at the door. Getting down and stating his business, he was shown into a room where a stern-faced man in uniform sat talking to another in evening clothes.

"I understand you come from Captain Hallam," said the Colonel.

"Yes, sir. He sent me with some papers."

"You know what they are?"

"Plans of pontoons, sir."

"Very well," said the Colonel, taking out a fountain pen. "Let me have them."

Dick put his hand into his breastpocket, which was on the outside of his coat. The pocket was unbuttoned, and the big envelope had gone. He hurriedly felt the other pockets, but they too were empty, and his face got red.

The Colonel looked hard at him, and then made a sign to the other man, who quietly went out.

"You haven't got the plans! Did you leave them behind?"

"No, sir," Dick said awkwardly. "I felt to see if they were in my pocket when I left the camp."

The Colonel's face hardened.

"Did you come straight here?"

"No, sir. I had an hour or two's leave."

"And spent it with your friends? Had you anything to drink?"

"Yes, sir."

"As much as, or more than, usual?"

"Perhaps a little more," Dick said in confusion.

The Colonel studied him with searching eyes; and then took some paper from a case on the table and began to write. He put the note in an envelope and gave it to Dick.

"It's your Commanding Officer's business to investigate the matter and you'll take him this. Report yourself to him or to the Adjutant when you reach camp. I'll telegraph to see if you have done so."

He raised his hand in sign of dismissal and Dick went out, crushed with shame, and feeling that he was already under arrest. If he were not in camp when the telegram came, he would be treated as a deserter.

CHAPTER III

THE PUNISHMENT

ON reaching camp and reporting himself, Dick was sent to his tent, where he slept until he was aroused by the bustle at reveille. He had not expected to sleep; but he was young and physically tired, and the shock of trouble had, as sometimes happens, a numbing effect. He awoke refreshed and composed, though his heart was heavy as he dressed, because he feared it was the last time that he would wear his country's uniform. The suspense was trying as he waited until the morning parade was over; then he was summoned to a tent where the Colonel and the Adjutant sat.

"I have a telegram asking if you have arrived," the Colonel said in a curious, dry tone. "You must understand that you have laid yourself open to grave suspicion."

"Yes," Dick answered, wondering whether the Colonel meant that it might have been better if he had run away.

"Very well. You admitted having received the plans. What did you do with them?"

"Buttoned them into the left pocket of my coat. When I got to Storeton, the envelope was gone."

"How do you account for that?"

"I can't account for it, sir."

The Colonel was silent for a few moments, and then he looked fixedly at Dick.

"Your statements were very unsatisfactory last night, and now that you have had time to think over the matter, I advise you to be frank. It's plain that you have been guilty of gross negligence, but that is not the worst. The drawings are of no direct use to the enemy, but if they fell into their hands they might supply a valuable hint of the use to which we mean to put the pontoons. You see what this implies?"

"I don't know how we mean to use them, sir, and I don't want to hide anything."

"That's a wise resolve," the Colonel answered meaningly; and Dick colored. After all, there was something he meant to hide.

"You took the plans with you when you left the camp, three or four hours before you were due at Storeton," said the Adjutant. "Where did you go?"

"To my cousin's rooms in the town."

"Mr. Lance Brandon's," said the Adjutant thoughtfully. "Did you stay there?"

"No; we dined at The George."

"A well-conducted house," the Adjutant remarked. "You took some wine at dinner?"

"Two glasses of light claret."

"Then where did you go next?"

"To the new music-hall."

"And ordered drinks in the bar! Who suggested this?"

"I can't remember," Dick replied with an angry flush. "Of course, I see where you're leading, but I was quite sober when I left the hall."

The Adjutant's expression puzzled him. He had

felt that the man was not unfriendly, and now he looked disappointed.

"I'm not sure your statement makes things better," the Colonel observed with some dryness. "Did you go straight to Storeton from the hall?"

"No, sir. I spent an hour at a friend's house."

"Whose house was it?"

Dick pondered for a few moments, and then looked up resolutely.

"I must decline to answer, sir. I've lost the plans and must take the consequences; but I don't see why my private friends, who have nothing to do with it, should be involved in the trouble."

The Adjutant leaned forward across the table and said something quietly to the Colonel, and neither of them spoke for the next minute or two. Dick was sensible of physical as well as mental strain as he stood stiffly in the middle of the tent. His knees felt weak, little quivers ran through his limbs, and a ray of hot sunshine struck through the hooked-back flap into his face, but he dared not relax his rigid pose.

The two officers looked puzzled but grave.

"Go back to your tent and stay there until I send for you," the Colonel said at last.

Dick saluted and went out, and when he sat down on his camp-bed he moodily lighted a cigarette and tried to think. His military career was ended and he was ruined; but this was not what occupied him most. He was wondering whether Clare Kenwardine had taken the plans. If so, it was his duty to accuse her; but, actuated by some mysterious impulse, he had refused.

The longer he thought about it, the clearer her

guilt became. He was a stranger and yet she had suggested a stroll through the garden and had slipped and clutched him as they went down the steps. Her hand had rested on the pocket in which the envelope was. She was the daughter of a man who kept a private gaming house; it was not surprising that she was an adventuress and had deceived him by her clever acting. For all that, he could not condemn her; there was a shadow of doubt; and even if she were guilty, she had yielded to some strong pressure from her father. His feelings, however, were puzzling. He had spent less than an hour in her society and she had ruined him, but he knew that he would remember her as long as he lived.

Dick's common sense led him to smile bitterly. He was behaving like a sentimental fool. On the whole, it was a relief when the Adjutant came in.

"You must have known what the Colonel's decision would be," he said with a hint of regret. "You're to be court-martialed. If you take my advice, you'll keep nothing back."

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The court-martial was over and Dick could not question the justice of its sentence — he was dismissed from the army. Indeed, it was better than he had expected. Somewhat to his surprise, the Adjutant afterward saw him alone.

"I'm thankful our official duty's done," he said. "Of course, I'm taking an irregular line, and if you prefer not to talk —"

"You made me feel that you wanted to be my friend," Dick replied awkwardly.

"Then I may, perhaps, remark that you made a

bad defense. In the army, it's better to tell a plausible tale and stick to it; we like an obvious explanation. Now if you had admitted being slightly drunk."

"But I was sober!"

The Adjutant smiled impatiently.

"So much the worse for you! If you had been drunk, you'd have been turned out all the same, but the reason would have been, so to speak, satisfactory. Now you're tainted by a worse suspicion. Personally, I don't think the lost plans have any value, but if they had, it might have gone very hard with you." He paused and gave Dick a friendly glance. "Well, in parting, I'll give you a bit of advice. Stick to engineering, which you have a talent for."

He went out and not long afterward Dick left the camp in civilian's clothes, but stopped his motorcycle on the hill and stood looking back with a pain at his heart. He saw the rows of tents stretched across the smooth pasture, the flag he had been proud to serve languidly flapping on the gentle breeze, and the water sparkling about the bridge. Along the riverside, bare-armed men in shirts and trousers were throwing up banks of soil with shovels that flashed in the strong light. He could see their cheerful brown faces and a smart young subaltern taking out a measuring line. Dick liked the boy, who now no doubt would pass him without a look, and he envied him with the keenest envy he had ever felt. He had loved his profession; and he was turned out of it in disgrace.

It was evening when he stood in the spacious library at home, glad that the light was fading, as he confronted his father, who sat with grim face in a big leather chair. Dick had no brothers and sisters, and

his mother had died long before. He had not lived much at home, and had been on good, more than affectionate, terms with his father. Indeed, their relations were marked by mutual indulgence, for Dick had no interest outside his profession, while Mr. Brandon occupied himself with politics and enjoyed his prominent place in local society. He was conventional and his manners were formal and dignified, but Dick thought him very much like Lance, although he had not Lance's genial humor.

"Well," he said when Dick had finished, "you have made a very bad mess of things and it is, of course, impossible that you should remain here. In fact, you have rendered it difficult for me to meet my neighbors and take my usual part in public affairs."

This was the line Dick had expected him to take. It was his father's pride he had wounded and not his heart. He did not know what to say and, turning his head, he looked moodily out of the open window. The lawn outside was beautifully kept and the flower-borders were a blaze of tastefully assorted colors, but there was something artificial and conventional about the garden that was as marked in the house. Somehow Dick had never really thought of the place as home.

"I mean to go away," he said awkwardly.

"The puzzling thing is that you should deny having drunk too much," Brandon resumed.

"But I hadn't done so! You look at it as the others did. Why should it make matters better if I'd owned to being drunk?"

"Drunkenness," his father answered, "is now an offense against good taste, but not long ago it was

thought a rather gentlemanly vice, and a certain toleration is still extended to the man who does wrong in liquor. Perhaps this isn't logical, but you must take the world as you find it. I had expected you to learn more in the army than you seem to have picked up. Did you imagine that your promotion depended altogether upon your planning trenches and gun-pits well?"

"That kind of thing is going to count in the new armies," Dick replied. "Being popular on guest-night at the mess won't help a man to hold his trench or work his gun under heavy fire."

Brandon frowned.

"You won't have an opportunity for showing what you can do. I don't know where you got your utilitarian, radical views; but we'll keep to the point. Where do you think of going?"

"To New York, to begin with."

"Why not Montreal or Cape Town?"

"Well," Dick said awkwardly, "after what has happened, I'd rather not live on British soil."

"Then why not try Hamburg?"

Dick flushed.

"You might have spared me that, sir! I lost the plans; I didn't sell them."

"Very well. This interview is naturally painful to us both and we'll cut it short, but I have something to say. It will not be forgotten that you were turned out of the army, and if you succeeded me, the ugly story would be whispered when you took any public post. I cannot have our name tainted and will therefore leave the house and part of my property to your cousin. Whether you inherit the rest or not will

depend upon yourself. In the meantime, I am prepared to make you an allowance, on the understanding that you stay abroad until you are sent for."

Dick faced his father, standing very straight, with knitted brows.

"Thank you, sir, but I will take nothing."

"May I ask why?"

"If you'd looked at the thing differently and shown a little kindness, it would have cut me to the quick," Dick said hoarsely. "I'm not a thief and a traitor, though I've been a fool, and it hurts to know what you think. I'm going away to-morrow and I'll get on, somehow, without your help. I don't know that I'll come back if you do send for me."

"You don't seem to understand your position, but you may come to realize it before very long," Brandon replied.

He got up and Dick left the library; but he did not sleep that night. It had been hard to meet his father and what he said had left a wound that would take long to heal. Now he must say good-by to Helen. This would need courage, but Dick meant to see her. It was the girl's right that she should hear his story, and he would not steal away like a cur. He did not think Helen was really fond of him, though he imagined that she would have acquiesced in her relatives' plans for them both had things been different. Now, of course, that was done with, but he must say good-by and she might show some regret or sympathy. He did not want her to suffer, but he did not think she would feel the parting much; and she would not treat him as his father had done.

When he called the next morning at an old coun-

try house, he was told that Miss Massie was in the garden, and going there, he stopped abruptly at a gap in a shrubbery. Beyond the opening there was a stretch of smooth grass, checkered by moving shadow, and at one side a row of gladioli glowed against the paler bloom of yellow dahlias. Helen Massie held a bunch of the tall crimson spikes, and Dick thought as he watched her with a beating heart that she was like the flowers. They were splendid in form and color, but there was nothing soft or delicate in their aggressive beauty. Helen's hair was dark and her color high, her black eyes were bright, and her yellow dress showed a finely outlined form. Dick knew that she was proud, resolute, and self-confident.

Then she turned her head and saw him, and he knew that she had heard of his disgrace, for her color deepened and her glance was rather hard than sympathetic. The hand that held the flowers dropped to her side, but she waited until he came up.

"I see you know, and it doesn't matter who told you," he said. "I felt I had to come before I went away."

"Yes," she answered calmly, "I heard. You have courage, Dick; but perhaps a note would have been enough, and more considerate."

Dick wondered gloomily whether she meant that he might have saved her pain by staying away, or that he had involved her in his disgrace by coming, since his visit would be talked about. He reflected bitterly that the latter was more probable.

"Well," he said, "we have been pretty good friends and I'm leaving the country. I don't suppose I shall come back again."

"When do you go?"

"Now," said Dick. "I must catch the train at noon."

Helen's manner did not encourage any indulgence in sentiment and he half resented this, although it made things easier. He could not say he had come to give her up, because there had been no formal engagement. Still he had expected some sign of pity or regret.

"You don't defend yourself," she remarked thoughtfully. "Couldn't you have fought it out?"

"There was nothing to fight for. I lost the papers I was trusted with; one can't get over that."

"But people may imagine you did something worse." She paused for a moment and added: "Don't you care what I might think?"

Dick looked at her steadily. "You ought to know. Do you believe it's possible I stole and meant to sell the plans?"

"No," she said with a touch of color. "But I would have liked you, for your friends' sake, to try to clear yourself. If you had lost the papers, they would have been found and sent back; as they were not, it looks as if you had been robbed."

That she could reason this out calmly struck Dick as curious, although he had long known that Helen was ruled by her brain and not her heart.

"I've been careless and there's nothing to be done but take my punishment."

She gave him a keen glance. "Are you hiding something, Dick? It's your duty to tell all that you suspect."

Dick winced. Helen was right; it was his duty, but

he was not going to carry it out. He began to see what this meant, but his resolution did not falter.

"If I knew I'd been robbed, it would be different, but I don't, and if I blamed people who were found to be innocent, I'd only make matters worse for myself."

"I suppose that's true," she agreed coldly. "However, you have made your choice and it's too late now. Where are you going, Dick?"

"To New York by the first boat from Liverpool."

He waited, watching her and wondering whether she would ask him to stop, but she said quietly: "Well, I shall, no doubt, hear how you get on."

"It's unlikely," he answered in a hard voice. "I've lost my friends with my character. The best thing I can do is to leave them alone."

Then he looked at his watch, and she gave him her hand. "For all that, I wish you good luck, Dick."

She let him go, and as he went back to the gate he reflected that Helen had taken the proper and tactful line by dismissing him as if he were nothing more than an acquaintance. He could be nothing more now, and to yield to sentiment would have been painful and foolish; but it hurt him that she had realized this.

When he wheeled his bicycle away from the gate he saw a boy who helped his father's gardener running along the road, and waited until he came up, hot and panting. The boy held out a small envelope.

"It came after you left, Mr. Dick," he gasped.

"Then you have been very quick."

The lad smiled, for Dick was a favorite with his father's servants.

"I thought you'd like to have the note," he an-

swered, and added awkwardly: "Besides, I didn't see you when you went."

It was the first hint of kindness Dick had received since his disgrace and he took the lad's hand before he gave him half a crown, though he knew that he must practise stern economy.

"Thank you and good-by, Jim. You must have taken some trouble to catch me," he said.

Then he opened the envelope and his look softened.

"I heard of your misfortune and am very sorry, but something tells me that you are not to blame," the note ran, and was signed "Clare Kenwardine."

For a moment or two Dick was sensible of keen relief and satisfaction; and then his mood changed. This was the girl who had robbed and ruined him; she must think him a fool! Tearing up the note, he mounted his bicycle and rode off to the station in a very bitter frame of mind.

CHAPTER IV

ADVERSITY

WHEN he had sold his motorcycle at Liverpool, Dick found it would be prudent to take a third-class passage, but regretted this as soon as the liner left the St. George's channel. The food, though badly served, was good of its kind, and his berth was comfortable enough for a man who had lived under canvas, but when the hatches were closed on account of bad weather the foul air of the steerage sickened him and the habits of his companions left much to be desired. It was difficult to take refuge in the open air, because the steerage deck was swept by bitter spray and often flooded as the big ship lurched across the Atlantic against a western gale.

A spray-cloud veiled her forward when the bows plunged into a comber's hollow side, and then as they swung up until her forefoot was clear, foam and green water poured aft in cataracts. Sometimes much of her hull before the bridge sank into the crest of a half-mile sea and lower decks and alleyways looked like rivers. The gale held all the way across, and Dick felt jaded and gloomy when they steamed into New York, a day late. He had some trouble with the immigration officers, who asked awkward questions about his occupation and his reason for giving it up, but he satisfied them at length and was allowed to land.

The first few days he spent in New York helped him to realize the change in his fortunes and the difficulties he must face. Until the night he lost the plans, he had scarcely known a care; life had been made easy, and his future had looked safe. He had seldom denied himself anything; he had started well on a career he liked, and all his thoughts were centered on fitting himself for it. Extravagance was not a failing of his, but he had always had more money than would satisfy his somewhat simple needs. Now, however, there was an alarming difference.

To begin with, it was obvious that he could only stay for a very limited time at the cheap hotel he went to, and his efforts to find employment brought him sharp rebuffs. Business men who needed assistance asked him curt questions about his training and experience, and when he could not answer satisfactorily promptly got rid of him. Then he tried manual labor and found employment almost as hard to get. The few dollars he earned at casual jobs did not pay his board at the hotel where he lived in squalid discomfort, but matters got worse when he was forced to leave it and take refuge in a big tenement house, overcrowded with unsavory foreigners from eastern Europe. New York was then sweltering under a heat wave, and he came home, tired by heavy toil or sickened by disappointment, to pass nights of torment in a stifling, foul-smelling room.

He bore it for some weeks and then, when his small stock of money was melting fast, set off to try his fortune in the manufacturing towns of Pennsylvania and Ohio. Here he found work was to be had, but the best paid kind was barred to untrained men by

Trade-union rules, and the rest was done by Poles and Ruthenians, who led a squalid semi-communistic life in surroundings that revolted him. Still, he could not be fastidious and took such work as he could get, until one rainy evening when he walked home dejectedly after several days of enforced idleness. A labor agent's window caught his eye and he stopped amidst the crowd that jostled him on the wet sidewalk to read the notices displayed.

One ticket stated that white men, and particularly live mechanics, were wanted for a job down South, but Dick hesitated for a few minutes, fingering a dollar in his pocket. Carefully spent, it would buy him his supper and leave something towards his meals next day, and he had been walking about since morning without food. If he went without his supper, the agent, in exchange for the dollar, would give him the address of the man who wanted help, but Dick knew from experience that it did not follow that he would be engaged. Still, one must risk something and the situation was getting desperate. He entered the office and a clerk handed him a card.

"It's right across the town, but you'd better get there quick," he said. "The job's a snap and I've sent a lot of men along."

Dick boarded a street-car that took him part of the way, but he had to walk the rest, and was tired and wet when he reached an office in a side street. A smart clerk took the card and gave him a critical glance.

"It looks as if we were going to be full up, but I'll put down your name and you can come back in

the morning," he remarked. "What do you call yourself?"

"A civil engineer," said Dick. "But where is the job and what's the pay?"

"I guess Central America is near enough; mighty fine country, where rum's good and cheap. Pay'll pan out about two-fifty, or perhaps three dollars if you're extra smart."

"You can get as much here," Dick objected, thinking it unwise to seem eager.

"Then why don't you get it?" the clerk inquired. "Anyhow, you won't be charged for board and all you'll have to do is to drive breeds and niggers. It's a soft thing, sure, but you can light out now and come back if you feel it's good enough for you to take your chance."

Dick went away, and had reached the landing when a man who wore loose, gray clothes and a big, soft hat, met him.

"What do you want?" he asked.

"I've been applying for the job in the South."

The other gave him a searching glance and Dick thought he noted his anxious look and wet and shabby clothes.

"What can you do?" he resumed.

"To begin with, I can measure cubic quantities, plan out excavating work, and use the level. If this kind of thing's not wanted, I can handle a spade."

"Where have you done your digging?"

"In this city. Laying sewers for a contractor, who, the boys said, had to squeeze us to make good the graft he put up to get the job."

The other nodded. "That's so; I know the man. You can use a spade all right if you satisfied him. But the sewer's not finished yet; why did you quit?"

"The foreman fired three or four of us to make room for friends that a saloon-keeper who commands some votes sent along."

"Well," said the other, smiling, "you seem to understand how our city bosses fix these things. But my job will mean pretty tough work. Are you sure you want it?"

"I can't find another," Dick answered frankly.

"Very well, I'll put you on. Look round to-morrow and get your orders. I've a notion that you're up against it; here's a dollar on account."

Dick took the money. He rather liked the man, whose abruptness was disarmed by his twinkling smile. For the first time, with one exception, during his search for employment, he had been treated as a human being instead of an instrument for doing a certain amount of work.

It was raining hard when he reached the street, and supper would be over before he arrived at his cheap hotel, where one must eat at fixed times or wait for the next meal. There was, however, a small restaurant with an Italian name outside a few blocks further on, and going in he was served with well-cooked food and afterwards sat in a corner smoking and thinking hard. He now felt more cheerful; but the future was dark and he realized the difficulties in his path.

American industry was highly organized. The man who hoped for advancement must specialize and make himself master of some particular branch. Dick had specialized in England, and thought he knew

his subject, but could not use his knowledge. The Americans to whom he tried to sell it would have none of him, and Dick owned that he could not blame them; since it was natural to suppose that the man who was unfaithful to his country would not be loyal to his employer. When he looked for other openings, he found capital and labor arrayed in hostile camps. There was mechanical work he was able to do, but this was not allowed, because the organized workers, who had fought stubbornly for a certain standard of comfort, refused to let untrained outsiders share the benefits they had won.

Business was left; but it needed money, and if he tried to enter it as a clerk, he must first obtain smart clothes and find somebody to certify his ability and character, which was impossible. It looked as if he must be content with manual labor. The wages it commanded were not low and he was physically strong, but he shrank from the lives the lower ranks of toilers led when their work was done. The crowded bunkhouse and squalid tenement revolted him. Still, he was young and optimistic; his luck might change when he went South and chance give him an opportunity of breaking through the barriers that shut him in. He sat in the corner, pondering, until it got late and the tired Italian politely turned him out.

Next morning he joined a group of waiting men at the railroad station. They had a dejected look as they sat upon their bundles outside the agent's office, except for three or four who were cheerfully drunk. Their clothes were shabby and of different kinds, for some wore cheap store-suits and some work-stained overalls. It was obvious that adversity had brought

them together, and Dick did not think they would make amiable companions. About half appeared to be Americans, but he could not determine the nationality of the rest, who grumbled in uncouth English with different accents.

By and by the clerk whom Dick had met came out of the office with a bundle of tickets, which he distributed, and soon afterwards the train rolled into the depot. Dick was not pleased to find that a car had been reserved for the party, since he would sooner have traveled with the ordinary passengers. Indeed, when a dispute began as the train moved slowly through the wet street, he left the car. In passing through the next, he met the conductor, who asked for his ticket, and after tearing off a section of the long paper, gave him a card, which he gruffly ordered him to stick in his hat. Then he put his hand on Dick's shoulder, and pushed him back through the vestibule.

"That's your car behind and you'll stop right there," he said. "Next time you come out we'll put you off the train."

Dick resigned himself, but stopped on the front platform and looked back as the train jolted across a rattling bridge. A wide, yellow river ran beneath it, and the tall factories and rows of dingy houses were fading in the rain and smoke on the other side. Dick watched them until they grew indistinct, and then his heart felt lighter. He had endured much in the grimy town; but all that was over. After confronting, with instinctive shrinking, industry's grimmest aspect, he was traveling toward the light and glamour of the South.

Entering the smoking compartment, he found the disturbance had subsided, and presently fell into talk with a man on the opposite seat who asked for some tobacco. He told Dick he was a locomotive fireman, but had got into trouble, the nature of which he did not disclose. Dick never learned much more about his past than this, but their acquaintance ripened and Kemp proved a useful friend.

It was getting dark when they reached an Atlantic port and were lined up on the terminal platform by a man who read out a list of their names. He expressed his opinion of them with sarcastic vigor when it was discovered that three of the party had left the train on the way; and then packed the rest into waiting automobiles, which conveyed them to the wharf as fast as the machines would go.

"Guess you won't quit this journey. The man who jumps off will sure get hurt," he remarked as they started.

In spite of his precautions, another of the gang was missing when they alighted, and Kemp, the fireman, grinned at Dick.

"That fellow's not so smart as he allows," he said. "He'd have gone in the last car, where he could see in front, if he'd known his job."

They were hustled up a steamer's gangway and taken to the after end of the deck, where their conductor turned his back on them for a few minutes while he spoke to a mate.

"Now's your time," said Kemp, "if you feel you want to quit."

Dick looked about. The spar-deck, on which the boats were stowed, covered the spot where he stood,

and the passage beneath the stanchions was dark. There was nobody at the top of the gangway under the big cargo-lamp, and its illumination did not carry far across the wharf. If he could reach the latter, he would soon be lost in the gloom, and he was sensible of a curious impulse that urged him to flight. It almost amounted to panic, and he imagined that the other men's desertion must have daunted him. For a few moments he struggled with the feeling and then conquered it.

"No," he said firmly; "I'll see the thing through."

Kemp nodded. "Well, I guess it's too late now."

Two seamen, sent by the mate, went to the top of the gangway, and the fellow who had brought the party from the station stood on guard near. Dick afterward realized that much depended on the choice he swiftly made and wondered whether it was quite by chance he did so.

"You were pretty near going," his companion resumed.

"Yes," said Dick, thoughtfully; "I believe I was. As a matter of fact, I don't know why I stopped."

The other smiled. "I've felt like that about risky jobs I took. Sometimes I lit out, and sometimes I didn't, but found out afterward I was right either way. If you feel you have to go, the best thing you can do is to get a move on."

Dick agreed with this. He did not understand it, but knew that while he had still had time to escape down the gangway and felt strongly tempted to do so, it was impressed upon him that he must remain.

A few minutes later their conductor left them with a sarcastic farewell, the ropes were cast off, and the

steamer swung out from the wharf. When, with engines throbbing steadily, she headed down the bay, Dick went to his berth, and on getting up next morning found the American coast had sunk to a low, gray streak to starboard. A fresh southwest breeze was blowing under a cloudy sky and the vessel, rolling viciously, lurched across the white-topped combers of the warm Gulf Stream.

After breakfast, some of his companions gathered into listless, grumbling groups, and some brought out packs of greasy cards, but Dick sat by himself, wondering with more buoyant feelings what lay before him. He had known trouble and somehow weathered it, and now he was bound to a country where the sun was shining. It was pleasant to feel the soft air on his face and the swing of the spray-veiled bows. After all, good fortune might await him down South.

CHAPTER V

THE CONCRETE TRUCK

IT was very hot in the deep hollow that pierced the mountain range behind Santa Brigida on the Caribbean Sea. The black peaks cut against a glaring sky and the steep slopes of red soil and volcanic cinders on one side of the ravine were dazzlingly bright. The other was steeped in blue shadow that scarcely seemed to temper the heat, and the dark-skinned men who languidly packed the ballast among the ties of a narrow-gage railroad that wound up the hill panted as they swung their shovels. At its lower end, the ravine opened on to a valley that got greener as it ran down to the glittering sea, on the edge of which feathery palms clustered round Santa Brigida.

The old city, dominated by its twin, cathedral towers, shone ethereally white in the distance, with a narrow fringe of flashing surf between it and the vivid blue of the Caribbean. It was a thriving place, as the black dots of steamers in the roadstead showed, for of late years American enterprise had broken in upon its lethargic calm. The population was, for the most part, of Spanish stock that had been weakened by infusions of Indian and negro blood, but there were a number of Chinamen, and French creoles. Besides

these, Americans, Britons, and European adventurers had established themselves, and the town was a hotbed of commercial and political intrigue. The newcomers were frankly there for what they could get and fought cunningly for trading and agricultural concessions. The leading citizens of comparatively pure Spanish strain despised the grasping foreigners in their hearts, but as a rule took their money and helped them in their plots. Moreover, they opened a handsome casino and less reputable gambling houses with the object of collecting further toll.

Such wealth as the country enjoyed was largely derived from the fertile soil, but the district about Santa Brigida was less productive than the rest and had been long neglected. There was rain enough all round, but much of the moisture condensed on the opposite side of the range and left the slopes behind the town comparatively arid. To remedy this an irrigation scheme was being carried out by American capitalists, and the narrow-gage railroad formed part of the undertaking.

A man dressed in rather baggy, gray clothes and a big, soft hat sat in the shadow of the rock. His thin face had been recently browned by the sun, for the paler color where his hat shaded it showed that he was used to a northern climate. Though his pose was relaxed and he had a cigar in his mouth, there was a hint of energy about him and he was following the curves of the railroad with keenly observant eyes. A girl in white dress of fashionable cut sat near him, holding a green-lined sunshade, for although they were in the shadow the light was strong. The likeness be-

tween them indicated they were father and daughter.

"I expect you're feeling it pretty hot," Fuller remarked.

"It is not oppressive and I rather like the brightness," the girl replied. "Besides, it's cool enough about the tent after the sun goes behind the range. Of course, you are used to the climate."

"I was, but that was twenty-four years ago and before you were born. Got my first lift with the ten thousand dollars I made in the next state down this coast, besides the ague and shivers that have never quite left me. However, it's pretty healthy up here, and I guess it ought to suit Jake all right."

Ida Fuller looked thoughtful, and her pensive expression added to the charm of her attractive face. She had her father's keen eyes, but they were, like her hair, a soft dark-brown; and the molding of brows and nose and mouth was rather firm than delicate. While her features hinted at decision of character, there was nothing aggressive in her look, which, indeed, was marked by a gracious calm. Though she was tall, her figure was slender.

"Yes," she agreed, "if he would stay up here!"

Fuller nodded. "I'd have to fix him up with work enough to keep him busy, and ask for a full-length report once a week. That would show me what he was doing and he'd have to stick right to his job to find out what was going on."

"Unless he got somebody to tell him, or perhaps write the report. Jake, you know, is smart."

"You're fond of your brother, but I sometimes think you're a bit hard on him. I admit I was badly riled when they turned him down from Yale, but it

was a harmless fool-trick he played, and when he owned up squarely I had to let it go."

"That's Jake's way. You can't be angry with him. Still, perhaps, it's a dangerous gift. It might be better for him if he got hurt now and then."

Fuller, who did not answer, watched her, as she pondered. Her mother had died long ago, and Fuller, who was largely occupied by his business, knew that Jake might have got into worse trouble but for the care Ida had exercised. He admitted that his daughter, rather than himself, had brought up the lad, and her influence had been wholly for good. By and by she glanced at Santa Brigida.

"It's the casino and other attractions down there I'm afraid of. If you had some older man you could trust to look after Jake, one would feel more satisfied."

"Well," said Fuller with a twinkle, "there's nobody I know who could fill the bill, and I'm not sure the older men are much steadier than the rest."

He stopped as a puff of smoke rose at the lower end of the ravine and moved up the hill. Then a flash of twinkling metal broke out among the rocks, and Ida saw that a small locomotive was climbing the steep track.

"She's bringing up concrete blocks for the dam," Fuller resumed. "We use them large in the lower courses, and I had the bogie car they're loaded on specially built for the job; but I'm afraid we'll have to put down some pieces of the line again. The grade's pretty stiff and the curves are sharp."

Ida was not bored by these details. She liked her father to talk to her about his business, and her interest

was quickly roused. Fuller, who was proud of her keen intelligence, told her much, and she knew the importance of the irrigation scheme he had embarked upon. Land in the arid belt could be obtained on favorable terms and, Fuller thought, be made as productive as that watered by the natural rainfall. It was, however, mainly because he had talked about finding her scapegrace brother employment on the work that Ida had made him take her South.

As she glanced at the track she noted that room for it had been dug out of the hillside, which was seamed by gullies that the rails twisted round. The loose soil, consisting largely of volcanic cinders, appeared to offer a very unsafe support. It had slipped away here and there, leaving gaps between the ties, which were unevenly laid and at the sharper bends overhung the steep slope below. In the meantime, the small locomotive came nearer, panting loudly and throwing up showers of sparks, and Ida remarked how the rails bent and then sprang up again as the truck, which carried two ponderous blocks of stone, rolled over them. The engine rocked, sparks flashed among the wheels as their flanges bit the curves, and she wondered what the driver felt or if he had got used to his rather dangerous work.

As a matter of fact, Dick Brandon, who drove the engine, felt some nervous strain. He had applied for the post at Kemp's suggestion, after the latter had given him a few lessons in locomotive work, and had since been sorry that he had obtained it. Still he had now a room to himself at the shed where the engine was kept, and a half-breed fireman to help him with the heavier part of his task. He preferred this to

living in a hot bunk-house and carrying bags of cement in the grinding mill, though he knew there was a certain risk of his plunging down the ravine with his engine.

The boiler primed when he started and was not steaming well. The pistons banged alarmingly as they compressed the water that spurted from the drain-cocks, and his progress was marked by violent jerks that jarred the couplings of the bogie truck. Though Dick only wore a greasy shirt and overall trousers, he felt the oppressive heat, and his eyes ached with the glare as he gazed up the climbing track. The dust that rolled about the engine dimmed the glasses, the footplate rattled, and it looked as if his fireman was performing a clumsy dance.

By and by he rather doubtfully opened the throttle to its widest. If the boiler primed again, he might knock out the cylinder-heads, but there was a steep pitch in front that was difficult to climb. The short locomotive rocked and hammered, the wheels skidded and gripped again, and Dick took his hand from the lever to dash the sweat from his eyes.

They were going up, and he would be past the worst if he could get his load round the curve ahead. They were half way round when there was a clang behind him and the engine seemed to leap forward. Glancing over his shoulder as he shut off steam, Dick saw the fireman gazing back, and a wide gap between the concrete blocks and his load of coal. The couplings had snapped as they strained round the bend and the truck would run down the incline until it smashed through the sheds that held the grinding and mixing plant at the bottom. He saw that prompt action was

needed, and reversing the machinery, gave the fireman an order in uncouth Castilian.

The fellow looked at him stupidly, as if his nerve had failed, or he thought the order too risky to obey. There was only one thing to be done, and since it must be done at once, Dick must undertake it himself. The engine was now running down the line after the truck, which had not gathered much speed yet, and he climbed across the coal and dropped upon the rear buffer-frame. Balancing himself upon it, he waited until the gap between him and the truck got narrower, and then put his hand on top of the concrete and swung himself across. He got his foot upon the side of the car and made his way along, holding the top of the block, while the dust rolled about him and he thought he would be jolted off. Indeed, there was only an inch-wide ledge of smooth iron to support his foot, which slipped once or twice; but he reached the brake-gear and screwed it down. Then, crawling back, he hooked on the spare coupling and returned, breathless and shaky, to his engine. A minute or two later he brought it to a stop and had got down upon the line when somebody called him.

Looking round, he saw Fuller standing near, and knew him as the man who had given him the dollar in the American town. He had heard that his employer had come out to see what progress was being made, but had not yet encountered him. He did not notice Ida, who was sitting in the shadow of the rock.

"You were smart," said Fuller. "There'd have been an ugly smash if the blocks had got away down the grade. But why didn't you stick to the throttle and send your fireman?"

"I don't think he understood what he ought to do, and there was no time to explain."

Fuller nodded. "So you did it yourself! But why didn't you push the car? You could have held her up better then."

"I couldn't get behind it. The loop-track down at the switches has caved in."

"I see. But it's a stiff grade and you didn't seem to be hustling your engine much."

"The boiler was priming and I was afraid of the cylinders."

"Just so. You pumped up the water pretty high?"

"No; it was at the usual working level," said Dick, who paused and resumed thoughtfully: "I can't account for the thing. Why does a boiler prime?"

There are one or two obvious reasons for a boiler's priming; that is to say, throwing water as well as steam into the engine, but this sometimes happens when no cause can be assigned, and Fuller saw that Dick did not expect an answer to his question. It was rather an exclamation, prompted by his failure to solve a fascinating problem, and as such indicated that his interest in his task was not confined to the earning of a living. Fuller recognized the mind of the engineer.

"Well," he replied, "there's a good deal we don't know yet about the action of fluids under pressure. But do you find the grade awkward when she's steaming properly?"

"I can get up. Still, I think it will soon cost you as much in extra fuel as it would to relay this bit of line. Two hundred cubic yards cut out at the bend would make things much easier."

"Two hundred yards?" said Fuller, studying the spot.

"Two hundred and fifty at the outside," Dick answered confidently, and then felt embarrassed as he saw Miss Fuller for the first time. His clothes were few and dirty and he was awkwardly conscious that his hands and face were black. But his employer claimed his attention.

"What would you reckon the weight of the stuff?"

Dick told him after a short silence, and Fuller asked: "Two-thousand-pound tons?"

"Yes; I turned it into American weight."

"Well," said Fuller, "you must get on with your job now, but come up to my tent after supper."

Dick started his locomotive, and when it panted away up the incline Fuller looked at his daughter with a smile.

"What do you think of that young man?"

"He has a nice face. Of course he's not the type one would expect to find driving a locomotive."

"Pshaw!" said Fuller. "I'm not talking about his looks."

"Nor am I, in the way you mean," Ida rejoined. "I thought he looked honest, though perhaps reliable is nearest what I felt. Then he was very professional."

Fuller nodded. "That's what I like. The man who puts his job before what he gets for it naturally makes the best work. What do you think of his manner?"

"It was good; confident, but not assertive, with just the right note of deference," Ida answered, and

then laughed. "It rather broke down after he saw me."

"That's not surprising, anyhow. I expect he's used to wearing different clothes and more of them when he meets stylish young women. It doesn't follow that the young fellow isn't human because he's professional. However, I want to see what the boys are doing farther on."

CHAPTER VI

A STEP UP

DUSK was falling when Dick went to keep his appointment with his employer. Fireflies glimmered in the brush beside the path, and the lights of Santa Brigida flashed in a brilliant cluster on the edge of the shadowy sea. High above, rugged peaks cut black against the sky, and the land breeze that swept their lower slopes brought with it instead of coolness a warm, spicy smell. There was more foliage when Dick reached the foot of a projecting spur, for a dark belt of forest rolled down the hill; and by and by he saw a big tent, that gleamed with a softened radiance like a paper lantern, among a clump of palms. It seemed to be well lighted inside, and Dick remembered having heard orders for electric wires to be connected with the power-house at the dam.

Fuller obviously meant to give his daughter all the civilized comfort possible, and Dick was glad he had been able to find a clean duck suit, though he was not sure he had succeeded in removing all the oily grime from his face. Nothing could be done with his hands. The knuckles were scarred, the nails broken, and the black grease from the engine had worked into his skin. Still, this did not matter much, because he had gradually overcome his fastidiousness and it was not likely that Miss Fuller would notice him.

She was, however, sitting outside the tent, from which an awning extended so as to convert its front into a covered veranda, and Dick was half surprised when she gave him a smile of recognition that warranted his taking off his hat. Then Fuller, beckoning him to come forward, switched on another lamp and the light fell on a table covered with plans. Dick stopped when he reached it and waited, not knowing how his employer meant to receive him.

"Sit down," said Fuller, indicating a chair, and then gave him one of the plans, some paper, and a fountain pen. "Study that piece of digging and let me know the weight of stuff to be moved, the number of men you'd use, and what you think the job would cost."

Dick set to work, and at once became absorbed. Twenty minutes passed and he did not move or speak, nor did he see the smile with which Ida answered Fuller's look. In another ten minutes he put down the pen and gave Fuller his calculations.

"I think that's near it, sir. I'm reckoning on the use of colored peons."

Fuller nodded. "You haven't left much margin for what we call contingencies. But they're going to bring us some coffee. Will you take a cigar?"

A Chinaman brought out a silver coffee-pot on a tray, which he placed on a folding table in front of Ida, and since it was two or three yards from the other, Dick got up when she filled the cups. She gave him two, which he carried back, but remained where she was, within hearing but far enough away not to obtrude her society upon the others. Dick, who lighted his cigar, felt grateful to Fuller. It was some

time since he had met people of any refinement on friendly terms, and until he took up his quarters in the locomotive shed had been living in squalor and dirt.

There was not much furniture outside the tent, but the neat folding tables, comfortable canvas chairs, delicate china, and silver coffee-pot gave the place a luxurious look, and though Miss Fuller was, so to speak, outside the circle, the presence of a well-dressed, attractive girl had its charm. Indeed, Dick felt half embarrassed by the pleasantness of his surroundings. They were unusual and reminded him poignantly of the privileges he had enjoyed in England.

"Where did you learn to make these calculations?" Fuller asked after a time.

"In the British Army, Royal Engineers," Dick answered with a flush.

"Were you an officer?"

Dick had dreaded the question. It looked as if truthfulness would cost him much; but he determined that his new friends should know the worst.

"Yes."

"Then why did you quit?"

Dick glanced at Ida, and imagined that she was interested, though she did not look up.

"I was turned out, sir."

"Ah!" said Fuller, without surprise. "May I ask why? It's not impertinent curiosity."

"I was sent with some important papers, which I lost. This was bad enough, but there was some ground for suspecting that I had stolen them."

"Do you know how they were lost?"

Dick was grateful for the way the question was

put, since it hinted that Fuller did not doubt his honesty.

"No," he said. "That is, I have a notion, but I'm afraid I'll never quite find out."

Fuller did not reply for a minute or two, and Dick, whose face was rather hot, glanced back at Ida. Her eyes were now fixed on him with quiet interest, and something in her expression indicated approval.

"Well," said Fuller, "I'm going to give you a chance of making good, because if you had done anything crooked, you wouldn't have told me that tale. You'll quit driving the locomotive and superintend on a section of the dam. I'm not satisfied with the fellow who's now in charge. He's friendly with the dago sub-contractors and I suspect I'm being robbed."

Dick's eyes sparkled. His foot was on the ladder that led to success; and he did not mean to stay at the bottom. Moreover, it caused him an exhilarating thrill to feel that he was trusted again.

"I'll do my best, sir," he said gratefully.

"Very well; you'll begin to-morrow, and can use the rooms behind the iron office shack. But there's something you have forgotten."

Dick looked at him with a puzzled air; and Fuller laughed.

"You haven't asked what I'm going to pay you yet."

"No," said Dick. "To tell the truth, it didn't seem to matter."

"Profession comes first?" Fuller suggested. "Well, that's right, but I've hired professional men, engineering and medical experts, who charged pretty high. Anyhow, here's my offer—"

Dick was satisfied, as was Fuller. The latter was often generous and would not have taken unfair advantage of Dick's necessity, but he did not object to engaging a talented young man at something below the market rate.

"While I'm here you'll come over twice a week to report," he resumed. "And now if there's anything you'd like to ask."

"First of all, I owe you a dollar," Dick remarked, putting the money on the table. "The pay-clerk wouldn't take it, because he said it would mix up his accounts. I'm glad to pay you back, but this doesn't cancel the debt."

"It wasn't a big risk. I thought you looked played out."

"I was played out and hungry. In fact, it took me five minutes to make up my mind whether I'd pay the agent who gave me your address his fee, because it meant going without a meal."

Fuller nodded. "Did you hesitate again, after you knew you'd got the job?"

"I did. When we were hustled on board the steamer, there was nobody at the gangway for a few moments and I felt I wanted to run away. There didn't seem to be any reason for this, but I very nearly went."

"That kind of thing's not quite unusual," Fuller answered with a smile. "In my early days, when every dollar was of consequence, I often had a bad time after I'd made a risky deal. Used to think I'd been a fool, and I'd be glad to pay a smart fine if the other party would let me out. Yet if he'd made the proposition, I wouldn't have clinched with it."

"Such vacillation doesn't seem logical, in a man," Ida interposed. "Don't you practical people rather pride yourselves on being free from our complexities? Still I suppose there is an explanation."

"I'm not a philosopher," Fuller replied. "If you have the constructive faculty, it's your business to make things and not examine your feelings; but my explanation's something like this — When you take a big risk you have a kind of unconscious judgment that tells you if you're right, but human nature's weak, and scares you really don't believe in begin to grip. Then it depends on your nerve whether you make good or not."

"Don't they call it sub-conscious?" Ida asked. "And how does that judgment come?"

"I guess it's built up on past experience, on things you've learned long since and stored away. In a sense, they're done with, you don't call them up and argue from them; but all the same, they're the driving force when you set your teeth and go ahead."

Ida looked at Dick. "That can't apply to us, who have no long experience to fall back upon."

"I've only made one venture of the kind, but I've just discovered that it turned out right."

Fuller smiled. "That's neat." Then he turned to Ida. "But I wasn't talking about women. They don't need experience."

"Sometimes you're merely smart, and sometimes you're rather deep, but I can't decide which you are just now," Ida rejoined. "However, I expect you're longing to get back to the plans."

"No," said Fuller. "They have to be thought of.

but life isn't all a matter of building dams. Now I'm getting old, I've found that out."

"And you? Have you any opinion on the subject?" Ida asked Dick.

Dick hesitated, wondering whether she meant to put him at his ease or was amused by his seriousness.

"I don't imagine my views are worth much and they're not very clear. In a way, of course, it's plain that Mr. Fuller's right —"

"But after all, building dams and removing rocks may very well come first?"

Dick pondered this. So far, his profession had certainly come first. He was not a prig or a recluse, but he found engineering more interesting than people. Now he came to think of it, he had been proud of Helen's beauty, but she had not stirred him much or occupied all his thoughts. Indeed, he had only once been overwhelmingly conscious of a woman's charm, and that was in Kenwardine's garden. He had lost his senses then, but did not mean to let anything of the kind happen again.

"Well," he said diffidently, "so long as you're content with your occupation, it doesn't seem necessary to make experiments and look for adventures. I expect it saves you trouble to stick to what you like and know."

He noted Ida's smile, and was silent afterwards while she argued with her father. He did not want to obtrude himself, and since they seemed to expect him to stay, it was pleasant enough to sit and listen.

The air was getting cooler and the moon had risen and cast a silver track across the sea. The distant rumble of the surf came up the hillside in a faint,

rhythmic beat, and the peaks above the camp had grown in distinctness. A smell of spice drifted out of the jungle, and Dick, who was tired, was sensible of a delightful languor. The future had suddenly grown bright and besides this, Ida's gracious friendliness had given him back his confidence and self-respect. He was no longer an outcast; he had his chance of making good and regaining the amenities of life that he had learned to value by their loss. He was very grateful to the girl and Fuller, but at length took his leave and returned to the locomotive shed with a light heart and a springy step.

Next morning he began his new work with keen energy. It absorbed him, and as the dam slowly rose in a symmetrical curve of molded stone, its austere beauty commanded his attention. Hitherto he had given utility the leading place, but a change had begun the night he sat beneath the copper-beech with Clare Kenwardine. The design of the structure was good, but Dick determined that the work should be better, and sometimes stopped in the midst of his eager activity to note the fine, sweeping lines and silvery-gray luster of the concrete blocks. There were soft lights at dawn and when the sun sank in which the long embankment glimmered as if carved in mother-of-pearl.

In the meantime, he went to Fuller's tent twice a week and generally met Ida there. Once or twice, he pleaded with his employer for extra labor and cement to add some grace of outline to the dam, and, although this was unproductive expenditure, Fuller agreed.

"I like a good job, but it's going to cost high if you mean to turn out a work of art," he said. "However, if Bethune thinks the notion all right, I suppose I'll have to consent."

Dick colored, and wondered whether he had been given a hint, for Bethune was his superior and a man of ability.

"He doesn't object, sir."

"That's good," Fuller replied with a twinkle. "Still, if you hustle him too much, you'll make him tired."

Dick did not smile, because he did not know how far it was wise to go, but he suspected that Bethune had been tired before he came to the dam. The latter was generally marked by an air of languid indifference, and while his work was well done he seldom exceeded his duty.

Next evening Dick went to see Bethune and found him lying in a hammock hung between the posts of the veranda of his galvanized iron hut. A syphon and a tall glass filled with wine in which a lump of ice floated, stood on a table within his reach, and an open book lay upside down upon the floor. He wore white duck trousers, a green shirt of fine material, and a red sash very neatly wound round his waist. His face was sunburned, but the features were delicately cut and his hands, which hung over the edge of the hammock, were well cared for.

"Mix yourself a drink," he said to Dick. "There's a glass and some ice in the bureau inside. Anyhow my steward boy put some there."

Dick, who went into the hut, came back with a grin. "There's a bit of wet blanket, but the ice has gone. It seems to have run into your papers."

"They'll dry," Bethune said tranquilly. "You had better put some of the *gaseosa* in the wine; it's sour Spanish *tinto*. Then if you like to pick up the book, I'll read you some François Villon. There was red

blood in that fellow and it's a pity he's dead. You get into touch with him better beside the Spanish Main than you can in New York."

"I never heard of him, and perhaps I ought to explain ——"

"What you came for? Then go ahead and ease your mind. It's business first with you."

"It occurred to me that I had perhaps taken too much upon myself now and then. You are my chief, of course, and I don't want to look pushing."

"That shows good taste," Bethune remarked. "But how are you going to get over the difficulty that you *are* what you call pushing? Anyhow, I'm surprised it did occur to you."

"To tell the truth, it was something Fuller said ——"

"So I imagined! Well, when you go too far I'll pull you up, but we needn't bother about it in the meantime. You were obviously born a hustler, but you have an ingenuousness that disarms resentment. In fact, you quite upset our views of the British character."

"Then the feeling's mutual," Dick rejoined with a grin. "You don't harmonize with what I've seen of Americans."

"Ours is a big country and we've room for different types; but I come from Georgia and we haven't all learned to hustle yet in the South. That's probably why I'm here, when I could have had a much better paid job."

Dick did not doubt this, because he had seen something of the other's mathematical powers. He was not a fool at figures himself, but Bethune could solve by a flash of genius problems that cost him laborious

calculation. It was strange that such a man should be content to make a very modest use of his talents.

"I suppose you have met Miss Fuller," Bethune resumed.

"Yes," said Dick. "She made things pleasant for me when I first went to the tent. I like her very much."

"Miss Fuller has most of the New England virtues, including a stern sense of her responsibility. I expect you don't know if she shares her father's good opinion of yourself."

"I don't know what Fuller's opinion is," Dick replied awkwardly.

Bethune laughed. "Well, he's given you a good job. But why I asked was this: if Miss Fuller's quite satisfied about you, she'll probably put her maverick brother in your charge. She came here not long ago with the object of finding out if I was suited for the post, and I imagined learned something about me in a quiet way. It was a relief when she obviously decided that I wasn't the proper man. The girl has intelligence. If she had asked me, I could have recommended you."

"Do you know much about her brother?"

"I've learned something. The lad's a breakaway from the sober Fuller type; and I think his views of life rather agree with mine. However, perhaps we had better let Miss Fuller tell you what she thinks fit. And now would you like some François Villon?"

"No," said Dick firmly. "I want to see that Moran turns out his gang at sunrise and must get back."

"Pick me up the book, anyhow," Bethune replied, and laughed good-humoredly when Dick left him.

CHAPTER VII

DICK UNDERTAKES A RESPONSIBILITY

THE glare of the big arc-lights flooded the broad, white plaza when Dick crossed it on his way to the Hotel Magellan. The inhabitants of Santa Brigida had finished their evening meal and, as was their custom, were taking the air and listening to the military band. They were of many shades of color and different styles of dress, for dark-skinned peons in plain white cotton, chattering negroes, and grave, blue-clad Chinamen mingled with the citizens who claimed to spring from European stock. These, however, for the most part, were by no means white, and though some derived their sallow skin from Andalusian and Catalan ancestors, others showed traces of Carib origin.

The men were marked by Southern grace; the younger women had a dark, languorous beauty, and although their dress was, as a rule, an out of date copy of Parisian modes, their color taste was good, and the creamy white and soft yellow became them well. A number of the men wore white duck, with black or red sashes and Panama hats, but some had Spanish cloaks and Mexican sombreros.

Flat-topped houses, colored white and pink and lemon, with almost unbroken fronts, ran round the square. A few had green lattices and handsome iron

gates to the arched entrances that ran like a tunnel through the house, but many showed no opening except a narrow slit of barred window. Santa Brigida was old, and the part near the plaza had been built four hundred years ago.

Dick glanced carelessly at the crowd as he crossed the square. He liked the music, and there was something interesting and exotic in the play of moving color, but his mind was on his work and he wondered whether he would find a man he wanted at the hotel. One could enter it by a Moorish arch that harmonized with the Eastern style of its front; but this had been added, and he went in by the older tunnel and across the patio to the open-fronted American bar that occupied a space between the balcony pillars.

He did not find his man, and after ordering some wine, lighted a cigarette and looked about while he waited to see if the fellow would come in. One or two steamship officers occupied a table close by, a Frenchman was talking excitedly to a handsome Spanish half-breed, and a fat, red-faced German with spectacles sat opposite a big glass of pale-colored beer. Dick was not interested in these, but his glance grew keener as it rested on a Spaniard, who had a contract at the irrigation works, sitting with one of Fuller's storekeepers at the other end of the room. Though there was no reason the Spaniard should not meet the man in town, Dick wondered what they were talking about, particularly since they had chosen a table away from everybody else.

The man he wanted did not come, and by and by he determined to look for him in the hotel. He went up an outside staircase from the patio, round which

the building ran, and had reached a balcony when he met Ida Fuller coming down. She stopped with a smile.

"I am rather glad to see you," she said. "My father, who went on board the American boat, has not come back as he promised, and the French lady he left me with has gone."

"I'm going off to a cargo vessel to ask when they'll land our cement, and we might find out what is keeping Mr. Fuller, if you don't mind walking to the mole."

They left the hotel and shortly afterwards reached the mole, which sheltered the shallow harbor where the cargo lighters were unloaded. The long, smooth swell broke in flashes of green and gold phosphorescence against the concrete wall, and the moon threw a broad, glittering track across the sea. There was a rattle of cranes and winches, and a noisy tug was towing a row of barges towards the land. The measured thud of her engines broke through the splash of water flung off the lighters' bows as they lurched across the swell, and somebody on board was singing a Spanish song. Farther out, a mailboat's gently swaying hull blazed with electric light, and astern of her the reflection of a tramp steamer's cargo lamp quivered upon the sea. By and by, Dick, who ascertained that Fuller had not landed, hailed a steam launch, which came panting towards some steps.

"I can put you on board the American boat, and bring you back if Mr. Fuller isn't there," he said, and when Ida agreed, helped her into the launch.

Then he took the helm while the fireman started the engine, and the craft went noisily down the har-

bor. As they passed the end of the mole, Dick changed his course, and the white town rose clear to view in the moonlight behind the sparkling fringe of surf. The flat-topped houses rose in tiers up a gentle slope, interspersed with feathery tufts of green and draped here and there with masses of creepers. Narrow gaps of shadow opened between them, and the slender square towers of the cathedral dominated all, but in places a steep, red roof struck a picturesque but foreign note.

"Santa Brigida has a romantic look at night," Dick remarked. "Somehow it reminds me of pictures of the East."

"That is not very strange," Ida answered with a smile. "The flat roof and straight, unbroken wall is the oldest type of architecture. Man naturally adopted it when he gave up the tent and began to build."

"Yes," said Dick. "Two uprights and a beam across! You couldn't get anything much simpler. But how did it come here?"

"The Arabs found it in Palestine and took it to Northern Africa as the Moslem conquest spread. The cube, however, isn't beautiful, and the Moors elaborated it, as the Greeks had done, but in a different way. The latter broke the square from the cornices and pillars; the Moors with the Saracenic arch, minarets, and fretted stone, and then forced their model upon Spain. Still the primitive type survives longest and the Spaniards brought that to the New World."

"No doubt, it's the explanation. But the high, red roofs yonder aren't Moorish. The flat top would suit the dry East, but these indicate a country where

they need a pitch that will shed the rain and snow. In fact one would imagine that the original model came from Germany."

"It really did. Spain was overrun by the Visi-Goths, who were Teutons."

"Well," said Dick, "this is interesting. I'm not an architect, but construction's my business, as well as my hobby."

"Then don't you think you are a fortunate man?"

"In a sense, perhaps," Dick answered. "Still, that's no reason you should be bored for my entertainment." He paused and resumed: "I'm grateful because you mean to be kind, as you were the night I met you first at the tent. Although you had heard my story, I saw you wanted to make me feel I was being given a fresh start."

Ida studied him with a thoughtful calm that he found embarrassing. "Perhaps I did, but suppose we talk about something else."

"Very well. If it's not bad form, I wasn't in the least astonished by your lecture about the roofs, because one finds your people have a breadth of knowledge that's remarkable. I once showed an old abbey near our place at home to some American tourists, and soon saw they knew more about its history than I did. There was a girl of seventeen who corrected me once or twice, and when I went to the library I found that she was right. The curious thing is that you're, so to speak, rather parochial with it all. One of my American employers treated me pretty well until he had to make some changes in his business. Took me to his house now and then, and I found his wife and daughters knew the old French and Italian

cities. Yet they thought them far behind Marlin Bluff, which is really a horribly ugly place."

"I know it," said Ida, laughing. "Still, the physical attractiveness of a town isn't it's only charm. Besides, are you sure you don't mean patriotic when you say parochial? You ought to sympathize with the former feeling."

"I don't know. Patriotism is difficult when your country has no use for you."

Ida did not reply, and it was a few minutes later when she said: "I'm glad I met you to-night, because we go home soon and there's a favor I want to ask. My brother is coming out to take a post on the irrigation work and I want you to look after him."

"But he mayn't like being looked after, and it's very possible he knows more about the work than I do. I've only had a military training."

"Jake has had no training at all, and is three or four years younger than I think you are."

"Then, of course, I'll be glad to teach him all I can."

"That isn't exactly what I mean, although we want him to learn as much as possible about engineering."

"I don't see what else I could teach him."

Ida smiled. "Then I must explain. Jake is rash and fond of excitement and gay society. He makes friends easily and trusts those he likes, but this has some drawbacks because his confidence is often misplaced. Now I don't think you would find it difficult to gain some influence over him."

"And what would you expect me to do afterwards?"

"You might begin by trying to make him see how interesting his new occupation is."

"That might be harder than you think," Dick replied. "Molding concrete and digging irrigation ditches have a fascination for me, but I dare say it's an unusual taste. Your brother mightn't like weighing cement in the hot mixing sheds or dragging a measuring chain about in the sun."

"It's very possible," Ida agreed with a hint of dryness. "I want you to show him what it means; make him feel the sense of power over material. Jake's rather boyish, and a boy loves to fire a gun because something startling happens in obedience to his will when he pulls the trigger. Isn't it much the same when one gives the orders that shatter massive rocks and move ponderous stones? However, that's not all. I want you to keep him at the dam and prevent his making undesirable friends."

"Though it's not the thing I'm cut out for, I'll try," said Dick, with some hesitation. "I'm surprised that you should put your brother in my charge, after what you know about me."

"You were unfortunate, negligent, perhaps, for once."

"The trouble is that my friends and relations seemed to think me dishonest. At least, they believed that my getting into disgrace was quite as bad."

"I don't," said Ida calmly. "What I ask will need some tact, but if you'll promise to look after Jake, I shall feel satisfied."

Dick was silent for the next few moments, watching the phosphorescent foam stream back from the

launch's bows. Then he said: "Thank you, Miss Fuller. In a way, it's embarrassing to feel you trust me; but I'll do what I can to deserve it."

Three or four minutes afterwards the launch steamed round the liner's stern and ran into the gloom beneath her tall side. There was a blaze of light above that fell upon the farthest off of the row of boats, past which the launch ran with her engine stopped, and the dark water broke into a fiery sparkle as the swell lapped the steamer's plates. A man came down the ladder when the launch jarred against its foot, and Ida, finding that Fuller was still on board, went up while Dick steamed across to the cargo-boat that lay with winches hammering not far off. After talking to her mate, he returned to the harbor, and when he landed, lighted a cigarette and studied some alterations that were being made at the landward end of the mole. He had noticed the work as he passed with Ida, but was now able to examine it. A number of concrete blocks and cement bags were lying about.

Beckoning a peon who seemed to be the watchman, Dick gave him a cigarette and asked: "How far are they going to re-face the mole?"

"As far as the post yonder, señor."

It was obvious that a large quantity of cement would be required and Dick resumed: "Who is doing the work?"

"Don Ramon Oliva."

Dick hid his interest. Ramon Oliva was the man he had seen talking to Fuller's storekeeper at the hotel.

"Where does one buy cement in this town?"

"Señor Vaz, the merchant, sells it now and then."

Dick let the peon go, and leaving the mole, found Vaz in a café. Sitting down at his table he asked: "Do you keep cement in your warehouse?"

"Sometimes," said the other; "when work it is required for is going on. But I sold the last I had two or three months ago."

"I believe we run short now and then, but we have a big lot being landed now. As our sheds will be pretty full, I could let you have a quantity if you like."

"Thanks, but no," said the merchant. "I do not think anybody would buy it from me for some time, and it is bad to keep when one's store is damp."

Dick, who drank a glass of wine with him, went away in a thoughtful mood. He wondered where Don Ramon got his cement, and meant to find out, though he saw that caution would be needed. He owed much to Fuller and had made his master's business his. Now it looked as if Fuller were being robbed and although he had, no doubt, cunning rogues to deal with, Dick determined that the thing must be stopped. When he returned to the dam he went to Bethune's hut and found him lying in his hammock.

"Whose duty is it to check the storekeeper's lists?" he asked. "I suppose you strike a balance between the goods delivered him and the stuff he hands out for use on the works."

"It's done, of course," said Bethune. "I haven't examined the books myself; François, the Creole clerk, is responsible. However, one would imagine you had duties enough without taking up another, but if you mean to do so, you had better begin soon. Your energy won't stand this climate long."

"I don't know what I may do yet," Dick replied. "Still, it struck me that our stores might be sold in the town."

"I expect they are, to some extent," Bethune carelessly agreed. "That kind of thing is hard to stop anywhere, and these folks are very smart at petty pilfering. Anyway, you might get yourself into trouble by interfering and any small theft you stopped probably wouldn't pay for the time you'd have to spend on the job. Leave it alone, and take matters as you find them, is my advice."

Dick talked about something else, but when he went back to his shack he knew what he meant to do.

CHAPTER VIII

AN INFORMAL COURT

ONE morning, soon after Fuller and his daughter had gone home, Dick stood at a table in the testing house behind the mixing sheds. The small, galvanized iron building shook with the throb of engines and rattle of machinery, and now and then a shower of cinders pattered upon the roof; for the big mill that ground up the concrete was working across the road. The lattice shutters were closed, for the sake of privacy, and kept out the glare, though they could not keep out the heat, which soaked through the thin, iron walls, and Dick's face was wet with perspiration as he arranged a number of small concrete blocks. Some of these were broken, and some partly crushed. Delicate scales and glass measures occupied a neighboring shelf, and a big steel apparatus that looked rather like a lever weighing machine stood in the shadow.

Where the draught that came through the lattices flowed across the room, Bethune lounged in a canvas chair, and another man, with a quiet, sunburned face, sat behind him. This was Stuyvesant, whose authority was only second to Fuller's.

"Brandon seems to have taken a good deal of trouble, but this kind of investigation needs the strict-

est accuracy, and we haven't the best of testing apparatus," Bethune remarked. "I expect he'll allow that the results he has got may be to some extent misleading, and I doubt if it's worth while to go on with the matter. Are you sure you have made no mistakes, Dick?"

Dick pondered for a few moments. If he were right, as he thought he was, the statements he had to make would lead to the discharge of the sub-contractor. Remembering his own disgrace, he shrank from condemning another. He knew what he had suffered, and the man might be innocent although his guilt seemed plain. It was a hateful situation, but his duty was to protect his master's interests and he could not see him robbed.

"You can check my calculations," he answered quietly.

"That's so," agreed Stuyvesant, who added with a dry smile as he noted Bethune's disapproving look: "We can decide about going on with the thing when we have heard Brandon."

"Very well," said Dick, giving him some papers, and then indicated two different rows of the small concrete blocks. "These marked A were made from cement in our store; the lot B from some I took from Oliva's stock on the mole. They were subjected to the same compressive, shearing, and absorbent tests, and you'll see that there's very little difference in the results. The quality of standard makes of cement is, no doubt, much alike, but you wouldn't expect to find that of two different brands identical. My contention is that the blocks were made from the same stuff."

Stuyvesant crossed the floor and measured the

blocks with a micrometer gage, after which he filled two of the graduated glass measures and then weighed the water.

"Well?" he said to Bethune, who had picked up Dick's calculations.

"The figures are right; he's only out in a small decimal."

Stuyvesant took the papers and compared them with a printed form he produced from his pocket.

"They correspond with the tests the maker claims his stuff will stand, and we can take it that they're accurate. Still, this doesn't prove that Oliva stole the cement from us. The particular make is popular on this coast, and he may have bought a quantity from somebody else. Did you examine the bags on the mole, Brandon?"

"No," said Dick, "I had to get my samples in the dark. If Oliva bought the cement, he must have kept it for some time, because the only man in the town who stocks it sold the last he had three months ago. The next thing is our storekeeper's tally showing the number of bags delivered to him. I sat up half the night trying to balance this against what he handed out and could make nothing of the entries."

"Let me see," said Bethune, and lighted a cigarette when Dick handed him a book, and a bundle of small, numbered forms. "You can talk, if you like," he added as he sharpened a pencil.

Dick moved restlessly up and down the floor, examining the testing apparatus, but he said nothing, and Stuyvesant did not speak. He was a reserved and thoughtful man. After a time, Bethune threw the papers on the table.

"François isn't much of a bookkeeper," he remarked. "One or two of the delivery slips have been entered twice, and at first I suspected he might have conspired with Oliva. Still, that's against my notion of his character, and I find he's missed booking stuff that had been given out, which, of course, wouldn't have suited the other's plans."

"You can generally count on a Frenchman's honesty," Stuyvesant observed. "But do you make the deliveries ex-store tally with what went in?"

"I don't," said Bethune dryly. "Here's the balance I struck. It shows the storekeeper is a good many bags short."

He passed the paper across, and Dick examined it with surprise.

"You have worked this out already from the muddled and blotted entries! Do you think you've got it right?"

"I'm sure," said Bethune, smiling. "I'll prove it if you like. We know how much cement went into stock. How many molded blocks of the top course have we put down at the dam?"

Dick told him, and after a few minutes' calculation Bethune looked up. "Then here you are! Our concrete's a standard density; we know the weight of water and sand and what to allow for evaporation. You see my figures agree very closely with the total delivery ex-store."

They did so, and Dick no longer wondered how Bethune, who ostentatiously declined to let his work interfere with his comfort, held his post. The man thought in numbers, using the figures, as one used words, to express his knowledge rather than as a

means of obtaining it by calculation. Dick imagined this was genius.

"Well," said Stuyvesant, "I guess we had better send for the storekeeper next."

"Get it over," agreed Bethune. "It's an unpleasant job."

Dick sent a half-naked peon to look for the man, and was sensible of some nervous strain as he waited for his return. He hated the task he had undertaken, but it must be carried out. Bethune, who had at first tried to discourage him, now looked interested, and Dick saw that Stuyvesant was resolute. In the meanwhile, the shed had grown suffocatingly hot, his face and hands were wet with perspiration, and the rumble of machinery made his head ache. He lighted a cigarette, but the tobacco tasted bitter and he threw it away. Then there were footsteps outside and Stuyvesant turned to him.

"We leave you to put the thing through. You're prosecutor."

Dick braced himself as a man came in and stood by the table, looking at the others suspiciously. He was an American, but his face was heavy and rather sullen, and his white clothes were smeared with dust.

"We have been examining your stock-book," said Dick. "It's badly kept."

The fellow gave him a quick glance. "Mr. Fuller knows I'm not smart at figuring, and if you want the books neat, you'll have to get me a better clerk. Anyhow, I've my own tally and allow I can tell you what stuff I get and where it goes."

"That is satisfactory. Look at this list and tell me where the cement you're short of has gone."

"Into the mixing shed, I guess," said the other with a half-defiant frown.

"Then it didn't come out. We haven't got the concrete at the dam. Are there any full bags not accounted for in the shed?"

"No, sir. You ought to know the bags are skipped right into the tank as the mill grinds up the mush."

"Very well. Perhaps you'd better consult your private tally and see if it throws any light upon the matter."

The man took out a note-book and while he studied it Bethune asked, "Will you let me have the book?"

"I guess not," said the other, who shut the book with a snap, and then turned and confronted Dick.

"I want to know why you're getting after me!"

"It's fairly plain. You're responsible for the stores and can't tell us what has become of a quantity of the goods."

"Suppose I own up that my tally's got mixed?"

"Then you'd show yourself unfit for your job; but that is not the worst. If you had made a mistake the bags wouldn't vanish. You had the cement, it isn't in the store and hasn't reached us in the form of concrete. It must have gone somewhere."

"Where do you reckon it went, if it wasn't into the mixing shed?"

"To the Santa Brigida mole," Dick answered quietly, and noting the man's abrupt movement, went on: "What were you talking to Ramon Oliva about at the Hotel Magellan?"

The storekeeper did not reply, but the anger and confusion in his face were plain, and Dick turned to the others.

"I think we'll send for Oliva," said Stuyvesant. "Keep this fellow here until he comes."

Oliva entered tranquilly, though his black eyes got very keen when he glanced at his sullen accomplice. He was picturesquely dressed, with a black silk sash round his waist and a big Mexican sombrero. Taking out a cigarette, he remarked that it was unusually hot.

"You are doing some work on the town mole," Dick said to him. "Where did you get the cement?"

"I bought it," Oliva answered, with a surprised look.

"From whom?"

"A merchant at Anagas, down the coast. But, señores, my contract on the mole is a matter for the port officials. I do not see the object of these questions."

"You had better answer them," Stuyvesant remarked, and signed Dick to go on.

Dick paused for a moment or two, remembering how he had confronted his judges in a tent in an English valley. The scene came back with poignant distinctness.

He could hear the river brawling among the stones, and feel his Colonel's stern, condemning gaze fixed upon his face. For all that, his tone was resolute as he asked: "What was the brand of the cement you bought?"

"The *Tenax,* señor," Oliva answered with a defiant smile.

Then Dick turned to the others with a gesture which implied that there was no more to be said, and quietly sat down. *Tenax* was not the brand that Fuller used, and its different properties would have appeared in

the tests. The sub-contractor had betrayed himself by the lie, and his accomplice looked at him with disgust.

"You've given the thing away," he growled. "Think they don't know what cement is? Now they have you fixed!"

There was silence for the next minute while Stuyvesant studied some figures in his pocket-book. Then he wrote upon a leaf, which he tore out and told Dick to give it to Oliva.

"Here's a rough statement of your account up to the end of last month, Don Ramon," he said. "You can check it and afterwards hand the pay-clerk a formal bill, brought up to date, but you'll notice I have charged you with a quantity of cement that's missing from our store. Your engagement with Mr. Fuller ends to-day."

Oliva spread out his hands with a dramatic gesture. "Señores, this is a scandal, a grand injustice! You understand it will ruin me? It is impossible that I submit."

"Very well. We'll put the matter into the hands of the *Justicia.*"

"It is equal," Oliva declared with passion. "You have me marked as a thief. The port officials give me no more work and my friends talk. At the *Justicia* all the world hears my defense."

"As you like," said Stuyvesant, but the storekeeper turned to Oliva with a contemptuous grin.

"I allow you're not such a blamed fool," he remarked. "Take the chance they've given you and get from under before the roof falls in."

Oliva pondered for a few moments, his eyes fixed

on Stuyvesant's unmoved face, and then shrugged with an air of injured resignation.

"It is a grand scandal, but I make my bill."

He moved slowly to the door, but paused as he reached it, and gave Dick a quick, malignant glance. Then he went out and the storekeeper asked Stuyvesant: "What are you going to do with me?"

"Fire you right now. Go along to the pay-clerk and give him your time. I don't know if that's all we ought to do; but we'll be satisfied if you and your partner get off this camp."

"I'll quit," said the storekeeper, who turned to Dick. "You're a smart kid, but we'd have bluffed you all right if the fool had allowed he used the same cement."

Then he followed Oliva, and Stuyvesant got up.

"That was Oliva's mistake," he remarked. "I saw where you were leading him and you put the questions well. Now, however, you'll have to take on his duties until we get another man."

They left the testing-house, and as Bethune and Dick walked up the valley the former said: "It's my opinion that you were imprudent in one respect. You showed the fellows that it was you who found them out. It might have been better if you had, so to speak, divided the responsibility."

"They've gone, and that's the most important thing," Dick rejoined.

"From the works. It doesn't follow that they'll quit Santa Brigida. Payne, the storekeeper, is of course an American tough, but I don't think he'll make trouble. He'd have robbed us cheerfully, but I expect he'll take his being found out as a risk of the game;

besides, Stuyvesant will have to ship him home if he asks for his passage. But I didn't like the look Oliva gave you. These dago half-breeds are a revengeful lot."

"I'm not in the town often and I'll be careful if I go there after dark. To tell the truth, I didn't want to interfere, but I couldn't let the rogues go on with their stealing."

"I suppose not," Bethune agreed. "The trouble about doing your duty is that it often costs you something."

CHAPTER IX

JAKE FULLER

A MONTH after Fuller sailed his son arrived at Santa Brigida, and Dick, who met him on the mole, got something of a surprise when a handsome youth landed and came straight towards him. Jake Fuller was obviously very young, but had an ease of manner and a calm self-confidence that would have done credit to an elderly man of the world. His clothes showed nice taste, and there was nothing about him to indicate the reckless scapegrace Dick had expected.

"You're Brandon, of course," he said as he shook hands. "Glad to meet you. Knew you a quarter of a mile off."

"How's that?" Dick asked. "You haven't seen me before."

"For one thing, you're stamped Britisher; then you had a kind of determined look, as if you'd come down to yank me right off to the irrigation ditches before I'd time to run loose in the city. Matter of duty to you, and you were going to put it through."

Dick said nothing, and Jake laughed. "Well, that's all right; I guess we'll hit it! And now we'll put out when you like. I laid in a pretty good breakfast on the boat; I like smart service and a well-chosen menu, and don't suppose you have either at the camp."

"They might be better," Dick agreed, feeling that he had promised Miss Fuller more than he might be able to perform. Then he told a peon to take Jake's luggage and led the way to a mule carriage at the end of the mole.

"I didn't expect to ride in a transfer-wagon," Jake remarked. "Haven't you any autos yet? If not, I'll indent for one when the next stock order goes home."

"Perhaps you had better wait until you see the roads."

"You're surely British," Jake replied. "If you'd been an American, you'd get the car first and make the roads fit in. However, you might tell the ancient dago to get a move on."

Dick was silent for the next few minutes. On the whole, he thought he would like Fuller, and made some allowance for the excitement he, no doubt, felt at beginning his career in a foreign country, but none for any wish to impress his companion. It was unlikely that the self-possessed lad would care what Dick thought of him, although it looked as if he meant to be friendly. Then as the sweating mules slowly climbed the rutted track out of the town Dick began to point out the changing level of the land, the ravines, or barrancos, that formed natural drainage channels from the high watershed, and the influence of drought and moisture on the cultivation. Jake showed a polite interest, but inquired what amusements were to be had in Santa Brigida, about which Dick gave him as little information as possible. If he had understood Miss Fuller's hints, the Spanish city was no place for her brother.

Jake spent the day following Dick about the works and made no complaint about the heat and dust, though he frowned when a shower of cement or a splash of oil fell upon his clothes. It was obvious that he knew nothing about engineering, but the questions he asked indicated keen intelligence and Dick was satisfied. A room adjoining the latter's quarters had been prepared for the newcomer, and they sat, smoking, on the veranda after the evening meal.

"Do you think you'll like your work?" Dick asked.

"I've got to like it, and it might be worse. Since I'm not allowed to draw or model things, I can make them, and I guess that's another form of the same talent, though it's considerably less interesting than the first."

"But perhaps more useful," Dick suggested.

"Well, I don't know. Our taste is pretty barbarous, as a rule, and you can't claim that yours is more advanced, but I allow that the Spaniards who built Santa Brigida had an eye for line and color. These dagos have a gift we lack; you can see it in the way they wear their clothes. My notion is that it's some use to teach your countrymen to admire beauty and grace. We're great at making things, but there's no particular need to make them ugly."

"Then you're a bit of an artist?"

"I meant to be a whole one and might have made good, although the old man has not much use for art. Unfortunately, however, I felt I had to kick against the conventionality of the life I led and the protest I put up was a little too vigorous. It made trouble, and in consequence, my folks decided I'd better be an

engineer. I couldn't follow their arguments, but had to acquiesce."

"It's curious how you artists claim to be exempt from the usual rules, as if you were different from the rest of us."

"We *are* different," Jake rejoined with a twinkle. "It's our business to see the truth of things, while you try to make it fit your formulas about what you think is most useful to yourself or society. A formula's like bad spectacles; it distorts the sight, and yours is plainly out of focus. For example, I guess you're satisfied with the white clothes you're wearing."

"I don't know that it's important, but what's the matter with them?"

"Well," said Jake, with a critical glance, "they're all wrong. Now you've got good shoulders, your figure's well balanced, and I like the way you hold your head, but your tailor has spoiled every prominent line. I'll show you some time when I model you in clay." He paused and grinned. "I guess the Roman sentinel pose would suit you best, as I noted it when you stood on the mole waiting for me, determined to do your duty at any cost. Besides, there is something of the soldier about you."

"I wish you'd stop rotting," said Dick with a touch of awkwardness, though he saw that Jake knew nothing about his leaving the army. "Was it your father's notion that you should be an engineer?"

"He thinks so," Jake answered, grinning. "My opinion is that you have to thank my sister Ida for the job of looking after me. She made this her busi-

ness until I went to Yale, when, of course, she lost control. Ida has a weakness for managing people, for their good, but you ought to take it as a delicate compliment that she passed me on to you."

"After all, Miss Fuller's age must be nearly the same as mine," Dick remarked.

"I see what you mean, but in some respects she's much older. In fact, I guess I could give you a year or two myself. But it seems to me you've kind of wilted since we began to talk. You've gone slack and your eyes look heavy. Say, I'm sorry if I've made you tired."

"I don't think you had much to do with it," said Dick. "My head aches and I've a shivery feeling that came on about this time last night. A touch of malarial fever, perhaps; they get it now and then in the town, though we ought to be free from it on the hill. Anyhow, if you don't mind, I'll get off to bed."

He went away, and Jake looked about the veranda and the room that opened on to it. There was a canvas chair or two, a folding table, a large drawing board on a trestle frame, and two cheap, tin lamps. It was obvious that Dick thought of nothing much except his work and had a Spartan disregard for comfort.

"A good sort, but it's concrete first and last with him," Jake remarked. "Guess I've got to start by making this shack fit for a white man to live in."

Dick passed a restless night, but felt better when he began his work on the dam next morning, though he did not touch the small hard roll and black coffee his colored steward had put ready for him. The air was fresh, the jungle that rolled down the hill glit-

tered with dew, and the rays of the red sun had, so far, only a pleasant warmth. Cranes were rattling, locomotives snorted as they moved the ponderous concrete blocks and hauled away loads of earth, and a crowd of picturesque figures were busy about the dam. Some wore dirty white cotton and ragged crimson sashes; the dark limbs of others projected from garments of vivid color. Dick drove the men as hard as he was able. They worked well, chattering and laughing, in the early morning, and there was much to be done, because Oliva's dismissal had made a difference.

The men flagged, as the sun got higher, and at length Dick sat down in the thin shade of a tree. The light was now intense, the curving dam gleamed a dazzling pearly-gray through a quivering radiance, and the water that had gathered behind it shone like molten silver. One could imagine that the pools reflected heat as well as light. Dick's eyes ached, and for a few minutes he let them rest upon the glossy, green jungle, and the belts of cultivation down the hill.

Then he roused himself, because he must watch what was going on. The great blocks must be properly fitted into place, and one could not trust the dusky laborers to use the care that was needed; besides, they were getting slack, and the fresh blocks the locomotives brought would soon begin to accumulate. Since this would mean extra handling and consequent expense, the track must be kept clear. Still, Dick wished noon would come, for his head ached badly and he felt the heat as he had not felt it before.

It was hard to force himself to begin again after

the short mid-day rest, but he became a little more vigorous as the sun sank and the shadow of the black cordillera lengthened across the valley. After dinner, when he lounged on the veranda, the headache and lassitude returned, and he listened to Jake's talk vacantly and soon went to bed. He knew he was not well, but while malarial fever was not unusual in the neighborhood people seldom took it in a virulent form, and as there was a good doctor at Santa Brigida he determined to consult him when he had occasion to visit the town. As it happened, a crane broke next day, and when evening came he set off to inquire if new castings could be made for it in the Spanish foundry. While he waited for an engine to take him down the line, Jake announced his intention of coming.

"I've never been round a Spanish town," he said.

"You're not going round a Spanish town now, if I can prevent it," Dick rejoined. "However, I suppose I can't order you off your father's locomotive."

Jake smiled. "You can resent my taking the line you hint at when I've done so, but I guess one must make allowances. You're getting the fever badly, partner."

"It's the heat," Dick answered in an apologetic tone. "Anyhow, Santa Brigida's a dirty, uninteresting place."

"I expect your ideas of what's interesting are different from mine. Concrete's all right in the daytime, though you can have too much of it then, but you want to please your eye and relax your brain at night."

"I was afraid of something of the kind. But here's the locomotive. Get up, if you're coming."

Dick was silent as the engine jolted down the track, for he was feverish and his companion's talk irritated him. Besides, he had promised Ida Fuller to take care of the lad and knew something of the license that ruled in the city. Jake seemed to claim the supposititious privileges of the artistic temperament, and there were wine-shops, gamblers, pretty Creole girls with easy manners, and ragged desperados who carried knives, in Santa Brigida. In fact, it offered too many opportunities for romantic adventures. In consequence, Dick went to the Hotel Magellan, which they reached after walking from the end of the line, and took Jake into the bar.

"You had better stop here; I won't be longer than I can help," he said. "They'll make you a rather nice iced drink of Canary *tinto*."

"Just so," Jake replied. "*Tinto's* a thin, sour claret, isn't it? In New York not long ago you could get iced buttermilk. Can't say I was fond of it, but I reckon it's as exhilarating as the other stuff."

Dick left him with some misgivings and went about his business. It was eight o'clock in the evening and the foundry would be closed, but he knew where the manager lived and went to his house, which was situated in the older part of the city. He had not taken Jake because he had to pass some of the less reputable cafés and gambling dens and thought it undesirable that the lad should know where they were. The foundry manager was not at home, but a languishing young woman with a thickly powdered face, who called her mother before she conferred with Dick, told him where Don Tomas had gone, and Dick set off again in search of the café she named.

A half moon hung low in the clear sky, but, for the most part, its light only reached a short distance down the white and yellow fronts of the flat-topped houses. These got light and air from the central courtyard, or patio, and the outer walls were only pierced by one or two very narrow windows at some height from the ground. The openings were marked here and there by a faint glow from within, which was often broken by a shadowy female form leaning against the bars and speaking softly to another figure on the pavement below.

There were few street lamps, and in places the houses crowded in upon the narrow strip of gloom through which Dick picked his way with echoing steps. Most of the citizens were in the plaza, and the streets were quiet except for the measured beat of the surf and the distant music of the band. A smell of rancid oil and garlic, mingled with the strong perfumes Spanish women use, hung about the buildings, but now and then a puff of cooler air flowed through a dark opening and brought with it the keen freshness of the sea. Once the melancholy note of a guitar came down from a roof and somebody began to sing in a voice that quivered with fantastic tremolos.

Dick went carefully, keeping as far as possible away from the walls. In Santa Brigida, all white men were supposed to be rich, and the honesty of the darker part of its mixed population was open to doubt. Besides, he had learned that the fair-skinned Northerners were disliked. They brought money, which was needed, into the country, but they also brought machines and business methods that threatened to disturb the tranquillity the Latin half-breed enjoyed.

The latter must be beaten in industrial strife and, exchanging independence for higher wages, become subject to a more vigorous, mercantile race. The half-breeds seemed to know this, and regarded the foreigners with jealous eyes. For all that, Dick carried no weapons. A pistol large enough to be of use was an awkward thing to hide, and he agreed with Bethune that to wear it ostentatiously was more likely to provoke than avoid attack.

Once he thought he was followed, but when he stopped to look round, the shadowy figure behind turned into a side street, and he presently found the man he was in search of in a quiet café. He spent some time explaining the drawings of the patterns that would be required before Don Tomas undertook to make the castings, and then languidly leaned back in his chair. His head had begun to ache again and he felt strangely limp and tired. The fever was returning, as it did at night, but he roused himself by and by and set off to visit the doctor.

On his way he passed the casino and, to his surprise, saw Jake coming down the steps. Dick frowned when they met.

"How did you get in?" he asked. "It's the rule for somebody to put your name down on your first visit."

"So it seemed," said Jake. "There are, however, ways of getting over such difficulties, and a dollar goes some distance in this country; much farther, in fact, than it does in ours."

"It's some consolation to think you've had to pay for your amusement," Dick answered sourly.

Jake smiled. "On the contrary, I found it profita-

ble. You make a mistake that's common with serious folks, by taking it for granted that a cheerful character marks a fool." He put his hand in his pocket and brought it out filled with silver coin. "Say, what do you think of this?"

"Put the money back," Dick said sharply, for there was a second-rate wine-shop not far off and a group of untidy half-breeds lounged about its front. Jake, however, took out another handful of silver.

"My luck was pretty good; I reckon it says something for me that I knew when to stop."

He jingled the money as he passed the wine-shop, and Dick, looking back, thought one of the men inside got up, but nobody seemed to be following them when they turned into another street. This was the nearest way to the doctor's, but it was dark and narrow, and Dick did not like its look.

"Keep in the middle," he warned Jake.

They were near the end of the street when two men came out of an arch and waited for them.

"Have you a match, señor?" one who held a cigarette in his hand asked.

"No," said Dick suspiciously. "Keep back!"

"But it is only a match we want," said the other, and Jake stopped.

"What's the matter with giving him one? Wait till I get my box."

He gave it to the fellow, who struck a match, and after lighting his cigarette held it so that the faint illumination touched Dick's face.

"Thanks, señor," said the half-breed, who turned to his companion as he added softly in Castilian: "The other."

Dick understood. It was not Jake but himself who was threatened; and he thought he knew why.

"Look out for that fellow, Jake!" he cried. "Get back to the wall!"

Jake, to Dick's relief, did as he was told, but next moment another man ran out of the arch, and somebody in the darkness called out in Castilian. Dick thought he knew the voice; but the men were behind him now, and he turned to face them. The nearest had his hand at his ragged sash, and Dick saw that he must act before the long Spanish knife came out. He struck hard, leaning forward as he did so, and the man reeled back; but the other two closed with him, and although his knuckles jarred as a second blow got home, he felt a stinging pain high up in his side. His breathing suddenly got difficult, but as he staggered towards the wall he saw Jake dash his soft hat in the face of another antagonist and spring upon the fellow. There seemed to be four men round them and one was like Oliva, the contractor; but Dick's sight was going and he had a fit of coughing that was horribly painful.

He heard Jake shout and footsteps farther up the street, and tried to lean against the house for support, but slipped and fell upon the pavement. He could neither see nor hear well, but made out that his assailants had slunk away and men were running towards Jake, who stood, calling for help, in the middle of the street. Shortly afterwards a group of dark figures gathered round and he heard confused voices. He thought Jake knelt down and tried to lift him, but this brought on a stab of burning pain and he knew nothing more.

CHAPTER X

LA MIGNONNE

A COOL sea breeze blew through the half-opened lattice, and a ray of sunshine quivered upon the ocher-colored wall, when Dick awoke from a refreshing sleep. He felt helplessly weak, and his side, which was covered by a stiff bandage, hurt him when he moved, but his head was clear at last and he languidly looked about. The room was spacious, but rather bare. There was no carpet, but a rug made a blotch of cool green on the smooth, dark floor. Two or three religious pictures hung upon the wall and he noted how the soft blue of the virgin's dress harmonized with the yellow background. An arch at one end was covered by a leather curtain like those in old Spanish churches, but it had been partly drawn back to let the air circulate. Outside the hooked-back lattice he saw the rails of a balcony, and across the narrow patio a purple creeper spread about a dazzling white wall.

All this was vaguely familiar, because it was some days since Dick had recovered partial consciousness, though he had been too feeble to notice his surroundings much or find out where he was. Now he studied the room with languid interest as he tried to remember what had led to his being brought there. The scanty furniture was dark and old; and he knew the wrinkled, brown-faced woman in black who sat by the

window with a dark shawl wound round her head. She had a place in his confused memories; as had another woman with a curious lifeless face and an unusual dress, who had once or twice lifted him and done something to his bandages. Still, it was not of her Dick was thinking. There had been somebody else, brighter and fresher than either, who sat beside him when he lay in fevered pain and sometimes stole in and vanished after a pitiful glance.

A bunch of flowers stood upon the table; and their scent mingled with the faint smell of decay that hung about the room. Lying still, Dick heard the leather curtain rustle softly in the draught, muffled sounds of traffic, and the drowsy murmur of the surf. Its rhythmic beat was soothing and he thought he could smell the sea. By and by he made an abrupt move that hurt him as a voice floated into the room. It was singularly clear and sweet, and he thought he knew it, as he seemed to know the song, but could not catch the words and the singing stopped. Then light footsteps passed the arch and there was silence again.

"Who's that?" he asked with an energy he had not been capable of until then.

"*La mignonne,*" said the old woman with a smile that showed her thick, red lips and firm white teeth.

"And who's Mignonne?"

"*La, la!*" said the woman soothingly. "*C'est ma mignonne.* But you jess go to sleep again."

"How can I go to sleep when I'm not sleepy and you won't tell me what I want to know?" Dick grumbled, but the woman raised her hand and began to sing an old plantation song.

"I'm not a child," he protested weakly. "But that's rather nice."

Closing his eyes, he tried to think. His nurse was not a Spanish mulatto, as her dark dress suggested. It was more likely that she came from Louisiana, where the old French stock had not died out; but Dick felt puzzled. She had spoken, obviously with affection, of *ma mignonne;* but he was sure the singer was no child of hers. There was no Creole accent in that clear voice, and the steps he heard were light. The feet that had passed his door were small and arched; not flat like a negro's. He had seen feet of the former kind slip on an iron staircase and brush, in pretty satin shoes, across a lawn on which the moonlight fell. Besides, a girl whose skin was fair and whose movements were strangely graceful had flitted about his room. While he puzzled over this he went to sleep and on waking saw with a start of pleasure Jake sitting near his bed. His nurse had gone.

"Hullo!" he said. "I'm glad you've come. There are a lot of things I want to know."

"The trouble is I've been ordered not to tell you much. It's a comfort to see you looking brighter."

"I feel pretty well. But can you tell me where I am and how I got there?"

"Certainly. We'll take the last question first. Somebody tore off a shutter and we carried you on it. I guess you know you got a dago's knife between your ribs."

"I seem to remember something like that," said Dick; who added with awkward gratitude: "I believe the brutes would have killed me if you hadn't been there."

"It was a pretty near thing. Does it strike you

as curious that while you made yourself responsible for me I had to take care of you?"

"You did so, anyhow," Dick remarked with feeling. "But go on."

"Somebody brought a Spanish doctor, who said you couldn't be moved much and must be taken into the nearest house, so we brought you here."

"Where is 'here'? That's what I want to know?"

"My orders are not to let you talk. We've changed our positions now; you've got to listen. For all that, you ought to be thankful you're not in the Santa Brigida hospital, which was too far away. It's three hundred years old and smells older. Felt as if you could bake bricks in it, and no air gets in."

"But what were you doing at the hospital?"

"I went to see a fellow who told me he'd been fired out of our camp. He came up just after the dago knifed you, and knocked out the man I was grappling with, but got an ugly stab from one of the gang. We didn't find this out until we had disposed of you. However, he's nearly all right and they'll let him out soon."

"Ah!" said Dick. "That must be Payne, the storekeeper. But, you see, I fired him. Why did he interfere?"

"I don't know. He said something about your being a white man and it was three to one."

Dick pondered this and then his thoughts resumed their former groove.

"Who's the mulatto woman in black?"

"She's called Lucille. A nice old thing, and seems to have looked after you well. When I came in she was singing you to sleep. Voice all gone, of course,

but I'd like to write down the song. It sounded like the genuine article."

"What do you mean by the 'genuine article'?"

"Well, I think it was one of the plantation lullabies they used to sing before the war; not the imitation trash fourth-rate composers turned out in floods some years ago. That, of course, has no meaning, but the other expressed the spirit of the race. Words quaint coon-English with a touch of real feeling; air something after the style of a camp-meeting hymn, and yet somehow African. In fact, it's unique music, but it's good."

"Hadn't I another nurse?" Dick asked.

Jake laughed. "I ought to have remembered that you're not musical. There was a nursing sister of some religious order."

"I don't mean a nun," Dick persisted. "A girl came in now and then."

"It's quite possible. Some of them are sympathetic and some are curious. No doubt, you were an interesting patient; anyhow, you gave the Spanish doctor plenty trouble. He was rather anxious for a time; the fever you had before the dago stabbed you complicated things." Jake paused and looked at his watch. "Now I've got to quit. I had orders not to stay long, but I'll come back soon to see how you're getting on."

Dick let him go and lay still, thinking drowsily. Jake had apparently not meant to answer his questions. He wanted to know where he was and had not been told. It looked as if his comrade had been warned not to enlighten him; but there was no reason for this. Above all, he wanted to know who was the girl with the sweet voice and light step. Jake,

who had admitted that she might have been in his room, had, no doubt, seen her, and Dick could not understand why he should refuse to speak of her. While he puzzled about it he went to sleep again.

It was dark when he awoke, and perhaps he was feverish or his brain was weakened by illness, for it reproduced past scenes that were mysteriously connected with the present. He was in a strange house in Santa Brigida, for he remarked the shadowy creeper on the wall and a pool of moonlight on the dark floor of his room. Yet the cornfields in an English valley, through which he drove his motor bicycle, seemed more real, and he could see the rows of stooked sheaves stretch back from the hedgerows he sped past. Something sinister and threatening awaited him at the end of the journey, but he could not tell what it was. Then the cornfields vanished and he was crossing a quiet, walled garden with a girl at his side. He remembered how the moonlight shone through the branches of a tree and fell in silver splashes on her white dress. Her face was in the shadow, but he knew it well.

After a time he felt thirsty, and moving his head looked feebly about the room. A slender, white figure sat near the wall, and he started, because this must be the girl he had heard singing.

"I wonder if you could get me something to drink?" he said.

The girl rose and he watched her intently as she came towards him with a glass. When she entered the moonlight his heart gave a sudden throb.

"Clare, Miss Kenwardine!" he said, and awkwardly raised himself on his arm.

"Yes," she said, "I am Clare Kenwardine. But

drink this; then I'll put the pillows straight and you must keep still."

Dick drained the glass and lay down again, for he was weaker than he thought.

"Thanks! Don't go back into the dark. You have been here all the time? I mean, since I came."

"As you were seldom quite conscious until this morning, how did you know?"

"I didn't know, in a way, and yet I did. There was somebody about who made me think of England, and then, you see, I heard you sing."

"Still," she said, smiling, "I don't quite understand."

"Don't you?" said Dick, who felt he must make things plain. "Well, you stole in and out and sat here sometimes when Lucille was tired. I didn't exactly notice you — perhaps I was too ill — but I felt you were there, and that was comforting."

"And yet you are surprised to see me now!"

"I can't have explained it properly. I didn't know you were Miss Kenwardine; but I felt I knew you and kept trying to remember, but I was feverish and my mind wouldn't take your image in. For all that, something told me it was really there already, and I'd be able to recognize it if I waited. It was like a photograph that wasn't developed."

"You're feverish now," Clare answered quietly. "I mustn't let you talk so much."

"You're as bad as Jake; he wouldn't answer my questions," Dick grumbled. "Then, you see, I want to talk."

Clare laughed, as if she found it a relief to do so. "That doesn't matter if it will do you harm."

"I'll be very quiet," Dick pleaded. "I'll only

speak a word or two now and then. But don't go away!"

Clare sat down, and after a few minutes Dick resumed: "You passed my door to-day, and it's curious that I knew your step, though, if you can understand, without actually recognizing it. It was as if I was dreaming something that was real. The worst of being ill is that your brain gets working independently, bringing things up on its own account, without your telling it. Anyhow, I remembered the iron steps with the glow of the window through the curtain, and how you slipped — you wore little white shoes, and the moonlight shone through the branches on your dress."

He broke off and frowned, for a vague, unpleasant memory obtruded itself. Something that had had disastrous consequences had happened in the quiet garden, but he could not remember what it was.

"Why did Lucille call you *ma mignonne?*" he asked. "Doesn't it mean a petted child?"

"Not always. She was my nurse when I was young."

"Then you have lived here before?"

"Not here, but in a country where there are people like Lucille, though it's long ago. But you mustn't speak another word. Go to sleep at once!"

"Then stay where I can see you and I'll try," Dick answered; and although he did not mean to do so, presently closed his eyes.

Clare waited until his quiet breathing showed that he was asleep, and then crossed the floor softly and stood looking down on him. There was light enough to see his face and it was worn and thin. His weakness moved her to pity, but there was something else.

He had remembered that night in England, he knew her step and voice, and his rambling talk had caused her a thrill, for she remembered the night in England well. Brandon had shielded her from a man whom she had good ground for wishing to avoid. He had, no doubt, not quite understood the situation, but had seen that she needed help and chivalrously offered it. She knew he could be trusted and had without much hesitation made her unconventional request. He had then been marked by strong vitality and cheerful confidence, but he was ill and helpless now, and his weakness appealed to her as his vigor had not done. He was, in a way, dependent on her, and Clare felt glad this was so. She blushed as she smoothed the coverlet across his shoulders and then quietly stole away.

There was no sea breeze next morning and the sun shone through a yellow haze that seemed to intensify the heat. The white walls reflected a curious subdued light that was more trying to the eyes than the usual glare, and the beat of the surf was slow and languid. The air was still and heavy, and Dick's fever, which had been abating, recovered force. He was hot and irritable, and his restlessness did not vanish until Clare came in at noon.

"I've been watching for you since daybreak, and you might have come before," he said. "Lucille means well, but she's clumsy. She doesn't help one to be quiet as you do."

"You're not quiet," Clare answered in a reproving tone. "Lucille is a very good nurse; better than I am."

"Well," said Dick in a thoughtful tone, "perhaps she is, in a way. She never upsets the medicine on

my pillow, as you did the last time. The nasty stuff got into my hair——"

Clare raised her hand in remonstrance. "You really mustn't talk."

"I'm going to talk," Dick answered defiantly. "It's bad for me to keep puzzling over things, and I mean to get them straight. Lucille's very patient, but she isn't soothing as you are. It rests one's eyes to look at you, but that's not altogether why I like you about. I expect it's because you knew I hadn't stolen those plans when everybody else thought I had. But then why did I tear your letter up?"

Clare made an abrupt movement. She knew he must be kept quiet and his brain was not working normally, but his statement was disturbing.

"You tore it up?" she asked, with some color in her face.

"Yes," said Dick in a puzzled voice, "I tore it all to bits. There was a reason, though I can't remember it. In fact, I can't remember anything to-day. But don't go off if I shut my eyes for a minute: it wouldn't be fair."

Clare turned her head, but except for this she did not move, and it was a relief when after a few disjointed remarks his voice died away. She was moved to pity, but for a few moments she had quivered in the grasp of another emotion. It was obvious that Dick did not altogether know what he was saying, but he had shown her plainly the place she had in his mind, and she knew she would not like to lose it.

Half an hour later Lucille came in quietly and Clare went away.

CHAPTER XI

CLARE GETS A SHOCK

FOR a week the stagnant heat brooded over Santa Brigida, sucking up the citizens' energy and leaving limp depression. Steaming showers that broke at intervals filled the air with an enervating damp, and the nights were worse than the days. No draught crept through the slits of windows into the darkened houses, and the musty smell that characterizes old Spanish cities gathered in the patios and sweltering rooms.

This reacted upon Dick, who had a bad relapse, and for some days caused his nurses grave anxiety. There was sickness in the town and the doctor could spare but little time to him, the nursing sister was occupied, and Dick was, for the most part, left to Clare and Lucille. They did what they could; the girl with pitiful tenderness, the mulatto woman with patience and some skill, but Dick did not know until afterwards that, in a measure, he owed his life to them. Youth, however, was on his side, the delirium left him, and after lying for a day or two in half-conscious stupor, he came back to his senses, weak but with unclouded mind. He knew he was getting better and his recovery would not be long, but his satisfaction was marred by keen bitterness. Clare had stolen his papers and ruined him.

Point by point he recalled his visit to Kenwardine's house, trying to find something that could be urged in the girl's defense and when he failed seeking excuses for her; but her guilt was obvious. He hated to own it, but the proof was overwhelming. She knew the power of her beauty and had treated him as a confiding fool. He was not revengeful and had been a fool, but it hurt him badly to realize that she was not what he had thought. He hardly spoke to Lucille, who came in now and then, and did not ask for Clare, as he had hitherto done. The girl did not know this because she was taking the rest she needed after a week of strain.

Jake was his first visitor next morning and Dick asked for a cigarette.

"I'm well enough to do what I like again," he said. "I expect you came here now and then."

"I did, but they would only let me see you once. I suppose you know you were very ill?"

"Yes; I feel like that. But I dare say you saw Kenwardine. It looks as if this is his house."

"It is. We brought you here because it's near the street where you got stabbed."

Dick said nothing for a minute, and then asked: "What's Kenwardine doing in Santa Brigida?"

"It's hard to say. Like other foreigners in the town, he's probably here for what he can get; looking for concessions or a trading monopoly of some kind."

"Ah!" said Dick. "I'm not sure. But do you like him?"

"Yes. He strikes me as a bit of an adventurer, but so are the rest of them, and he's none the worse

for that. Trying to get ahead of dago politicians is a risky job."

"Is he running this place as a gambling house?"

"No," said Jake warmly; "that's much too strong. There is some card play evenings, and I've lost a few dollars myself, but the stakes are moderate and anything he makes on the bank wouldn't be worth while. He enjoys a game, that's all. So do other people; we're not all like you."

"Did you see Miss Kenwardine when you came for a game?"

"I did, but I want to point out that I came to see you. She walked through the patio, where we generally sat, and spoke to us pleasantly, but seldom stopped more than a minute. A matter of politeness, I imagine, and no doubt she'd sooner have stayed away."

"Kenwardine ought to keep her away. One wonders why he brought the girl to a place like this."

Jake frowned thoughtfully. "Perhaps your remark is justified, in a sense, but you mustn't carry the idea too far. He's not using his daughter as an attraction; it's unthinkable."

"That is so," agreed Dick.

"Well," said Jake, "I allow that our talking about it is in pretty bad taste, but my view is this: Somehow, I don't think Kenwardine has much money and he may feel he has to give the girl a chance."

"To marry some gambling rake?"

"No," said Jake sharply. "It doesn't follow that a man is trash because he stakes a dollar or two now and then, and there are some pretty straight fellows

in Santa Brigida." Then he paused and grinned. "Take yourself, for example; you've talent enough to carry you some way, and I'm open to allow you're about as sober as a man could be."

"As it happens, I'm not eligible," Dick rejoined with a touch of grimness. "Kenwardine wouldn't think me worth powder and shot, and I've a disadvantage you don't know of yet."

"Anyhow, it strikes me you're taking a rather strange line. Kenwardine let us bring you here when you were badly hurt, and Miss Kenwardine has given herself a good deal of trouble about you. In fact, I guess you owe it to her that you're recovering."

"That's true, I think," said Dick. "I can't remember much about my illness, but I've a notion that she took very good care of me. Still, there's no reason I should give her further trouble when I'm getting better, and I want you to make arrangements for carrying me back to the dam. Perhaps a hammock would be the best plan."

"You're not fit to be moved yet."

"I'm going, anyhow," Dick replied with quiet resolution.

After trying in vain to persuade him, Jake went away, and soon afterwards Kenwardine came in. The light was strong and Dick noted the touches of gray in his short, dark hair, but except for this he looked young and athletic. His figure was graceful, his dress picturesque, for he wore white duck with a colored silk shirt and red sash, and he had an easy, good-humored manner. Sitting down close by, he gave Dick a friendly smile.

"I'm glad to find you looking better, but am surprised to hear you think of leaving us," he said.

"My work must be falling behind and Stuyvesant has nobody to put in my place."

"He sent word that they were getting on all right," Kenwardine remarked.

"I'm afraid he was overstating it with a good motive. Then, you see, I have given you and Miss Kenwardine a good deal of trouble and can't take advantage of your kindness any longer. It would be an unfair advantage, because I'm getting well. Of course I'm very grateful, particularly as I have no claim on you."

"That is a point you can hardly urge. You are a countryman, and your cousin is a friend of mine. I think on that ground we are justified in regarding you as an acquaintance."

Dick was silent for a few moments. He felt that had things been different he would have liked Kenwardine. The man had charm and had placed him under a heavy obligation. Dick admitted this frankly, but could not stay any longer in his house. He had, however, a better reason for going than his dislike to accepting Kenwardine's hospitality. Clare had robbed him and he must get away before he thought of her too much. It was an awkward situation and he feared he had not tact enough to deal with it.

"The truth is, I've no wish to renew my acquaintance with people I met in England, and I went to America in order to avoid doing so," he said. "You know what happened before I left."

"Yes; but I think you are exaggerating its im-

portance. After all, you're not the only man who has, through nothing worse than carelessness, had a black mark put against his name. You may have a chance yet of showing that the thing was a mistake."

"Then I must wait until the chance comes," Dick answered firmly.

"Very well," said Kenwardine. "Since this means you're determined to go, we must try to make it as easy as possible for you. I'll see the doctor and Mr. Fuller."

He went out, and by and by Clare came in and noted a difference in Dick. He had generally greeted her as eagerly as his weakness allowed, and showed his dependence on her, but now his face was hard and resolute. The change was puzzling and disturbing.

"My father tells me you want to go away," she remarked.

"I don't want to, but I must," Dick answered with a candor he had not meant to show. "You see, things I ought to be looking after will all go wrong at the dam."

"Isn't that rather egotistical?" Clare asked with a forced smile. "I have seen Mr. Bethune, who doesn't look overworked and probably doesn't mind the extra duty. In fact, he said so."

"People sometimes say such things, but when they have to do a good deal more than usual they mind very much. Anyhow, it isn't fair to ask them, and that's one reason for my going away."

Clare colored and her eyes began to sparkle. "Do you think we mind?"

"I don't," Dick answered awkwardly, feeling that he was not getting on very well. "I know how kind

you are and that you wouldn't shirk any trouble. But still ——"

"Suppose we don't think it a trouble?"

Dick knitted his brows. It was hard to believe that the girl who sat watching him with a puzzled look was an adventuress. He had made her blush, and had come near to making her angry, while an adventuress would not have shown her feelings so easily. The light that shone through the window touched her face, and he noted its delicate modeling, the purity of her skin, and the softness of her eyes. The sparkle had gone, and they were pitiful. Clare had forgiven his ingratitude because he was ill.

"Well," he said, "what you think doesn't alter the fact that I have given you trouble and kept you awake looking after me at night. I wasn't always quite sensible, but I remember how often you sat here and brought me cool things to drink. Indeed, I expect you helped to save my life." He paused and resumed in a voice that thrilled with feeling: "This wasn't all you did. When I was having a very bad time before I left England and everybody believed the worst, you sent me a letter saying that you knew I was innocent."

"You told me you tore up the letter," Clare remarked quietly.

Dick's face got red. He had not taken the line he meant to take and was obviously making a mess of things.

"Are you sure I wasn't delirious?"

"I don't think so. Did you tear up the letter?"

He gave her a steady look, for he saw that he must nerve himself to face the situation. It was unfor-

tunate that he was too ill to deal with it properly, but he must do the best he could.

"I'll answer that if you'll tell me how you knew I was innocent."

Clare looked puzzled, as if his manner had jarred; and Dick saw that she was not acting. Her surprise was real. He could not understand this, but felt ashamed of himself.

"In a sense, of course, I didn't know," she answered with a touch of embarrassment. "Still, I felt you didn't steal the plans. It seemed impossible."

"Thank you," said Dick, who was silent for the next few moments. He thought candor was needed and had meant to be frank, but he could not wound the girl who had taken care of him.

"Anyhow, I lost the papers and that was almost as bad," he resumed feebly. "When you get into trouble people don't care much whether you're a rogue or a fool. You're in disgrace and that's all that matters. However, I mustn't bore you with my grumbling. I'm getting better and they want me at the dam."

"Then I suppose you must go as soon as you are able," Clare agreed, and began to talk about something else.

She left him soon and Dick lay still, frowning. It had been a trying interview and he doubted if he had come through it well, but hoped Clare would make allowances for his being ill. He did not want her to think him ungrateful, and had certainly no wish to punish her for what had happened in the past. But she had stolen his papers and he must get away.

He was taken away next morning, with the consent

of the doctor, who agreed that the air would be more invigorating on the hill. Clare did not come down to see him off and Dick felt strangely disappointed, although she had wished him a quick recovery on the previous evening. Kenwardine, however, helped him into his hammock and after the carriers started went back to the room where Clare sat. He noted that although the sun was hot the shutter was not drawn across the window, which commanded the street.

"Well," he said, "Mr. Brandon has gone and on the whole that's a relief."

"Do you know why he went so soon?" Clare asked.

Kenwardine sat down and looked at her thoughtfully. He was fond of Clare, though he found her something of an embarrassment now and then. He was not rich and ran certain risks that made his ability to provide for her doubtful, while she had no marked talents to fall back upon if things went against him. There was, however, the possibility that her beauty might enable her to make a good marriage, and although Kenwardine could not do much at present to forward this plan he must try to prevent any undesirable entanglement. Brandon, for example, was not to be thought of, but he suspected Clare of some liking for the young man.

"Yes," he said, "I know and sympathize with him. In fact, I quite see why he found it difficult to stay. The situation was only tolerable while he was very ill."

"Why?"

Kenwardine meant to tell her. It was better that she should smart a little now than suffer worse afterwards.

"As soon as he began to get better Brandon remembered that we were the cause of his misfortunes. You can see how this complicated things."

"But we had nothing to do with them," Clare said sharply. "What made him think we had?"

"It's not an illogical conclusion when he imagines that he lost his papers in our house."

Clare got up with a red flush in her face and her eyes sparkling. "It's absurd!" she exclaimed. "He must have been delirious when he said so."

"He didn't say so in as many words; Brandon has some taste. But he was perfectly sensible and intended me to see what he meant."

The girl stood still, trembling with anger and confusion, and Kenwardine felt sorry for her. She was worse hurt than he had expected, but she would rally.

"But he couldn't have been robbed while he was with us," she said with an effort, trying to understand Dick's point of view. "He hadn't an overcoat, so the plans must have been in the pocket of his uniform, and nobody except myself was near him."

She stopped with a gasp as she remembered how she had slipped and seized Dick. In doing so her hand had caught his pocket. Everything was plain now, and for a few moments she felt overwhelmed. Her face blanched, but her eyes were hard and very bright.

Kenwardine left her, feeling that Brandon would have cause to regret his rashness if he ever attempted to renew her acquaintance, and Clare sat down and tried to conquer her anger. This was difficult, because she had received an intolerable insult. Brandon thought her a thief! It was plain that he did so,

because the change in his manner bore out all her father had said, and there was no other explanation. Then she blushed with shame as she realized that from his point of view her unconventional behavior warranted his suspicions. She had asked him to come into the garden and had written him a note! This was horribly foolish and she must pay for it, but she had been mistaken about his character.

She had, as a rule, avoided the men she met at her father's house and had shrunk with frank repugnance from one or two, but Brandon had seemed different. Then he had watched for her when he was ill and she had seen his heavy eyes get brighter when she came into the room. Now, however, she understood him better. She had some beauty and he had been satisfied with her physical attractiveness, although he thought her a thief. This was worse than the coarse admiration of the men she had feared. It was unthinkably humiliating, but her anger helped her to bear the blow. After all, she was fortunate in finding out what Brandon was, since it might have been worse had the knowledge come later. There was a sting in this that rankled, but she could banish him from her thoughts now.

CHAPTER XII

DICK KEEPS HIS PROMISE

TWINKLING points of light that pierced the darkness lower down the hill marked the colored laborers' camp, and voices came up faintly through the still air. The range cut off the land breeze, though now and then a wandering draught flickered down the hollow spanned by the dam, and a smell of hot earth and damp jungle hung about the veranda of Dick's iron shack. He sat near a lamp, with a drawing-board on his knee, while Jake lounged in a canvas chair, smoking and occasionally glancing at the sheet of figures in his hand. His expression was gloomily resigned.

"I suppose you'll have things ready for us in the morning," Dick said presently.

"François' accounts are checked and I'm surprised to find them right, but I imagine the other calculations will not be finished. Anyhow, it won't make much difference whether they are or not. I guess you know that!"

"Well, of course, if you can't manage to do the lot ——"

"I don't say it's impossible," Jake rejoined. "But beginning work before breakfast is bad enough, without going on after dinner. Understand that I don't question your authority to find me a job at night; it's your object that makes me kick."

"We want the calculations made before we set the boys to dig."

"Then why didn't you give me them when I was doing nothing this afternoon?" Jake inquired.

"I hadn't got the plans ready."

"Just so. You haven't had things ready for me until after dinner all this week. As you're a methodical fellow that's rather strange. Still, if you really want the job finished, I'll have to do my best, but I'm going out first for a quarter of an hour."

"You needn't," Dick said dryly. "If you mean to tell the engineer not to wait, he's gone. I sent him off some time since."

"Of course you had a right to send him off," Jake replied in an injured tone. "But I don't quite think ——"

"You know what your father pays for coal. Have you reckoned what it costs to keep a locomotive two or three hours for the purpose of taking you to Santa Brigida and back?"

"I haven't, but I expect the old man wouldn't stand for my running a private car," Jake admitted. "However, it's the only way of getting into town."

"You were there three nights last week. What's more, you tried to draw your next month's wages. That struck me as significant, though I'd fortunately provided against it."

"So I found out. I suppose I ought to be grateful for your thoughtfulness but can't say I am. I wanted the money because I had a run of wretched luck."

"At the casino?"

"No," said Jake, shortly.

"Then you were at Kenwardine's; I'll own that's

what I wanted to prevent. He's a dangerous man and his house is no place for you."

"One would hardly expect you to speak against him. Considering everything, it's perhaps not quite in good taste."

Dick put down the drawing-board and looked at him steadily. "It's very bad taste. In fact, I find myself in a very awkward situation. Your father gave me a fresh start when I needed it badly, and agreed when your sister put you in my charge."

"Ida's sometimes a bit officious," Jake remarked.

"Well," Dick continued, "I promised to look after you, and although I didn't know what I was undertaking, the promise must be kept. It's true that Kenwardine afterwards did me a great service; but his placing me under an obligation doesn't relieve me from the other, which I'd incurred first."

Somewhat to his surprise, Jake nodded agreement. "No, not from your point of view. But what makes you think Kenwardine *is* dangerous?"

"I can't answer. You had better take it for granted that I know what I'm talking about, and keep away from him."

"As a matter of fact, it was Miss Kenwardine to whom you owed most," Jake said meaningly. "Do you suggest that she's dangerous, too?"

Dick frowned and his face got red, but he said nothing, and Jake resumed: "There's a mystery about the matter and you know more than you intend to tell; but if you blame the girl for anything, you're absolutely wrong. If you'll wait a minute, I'll show you what I mean."

He went into the shack and came back with a draw-

ing-block which he stood upon the table under the lamp, and Dick saw that it was a water-color portrait of Clare Kenwardine. He did not know much about pictures, but it was obvious that Jake had talent. The girl stood in the patio, with a pale-yellow wall behind her, over which a vivid purple creeper trailed. Her lilac dress showed the graceful lines of her slender figure against the harmonious background, and matched the soft blue of her eyes and the delicate white and pink of her skin. The patio was flooded with strong sunlight, but the girl looked strangely fresh and cool.

"I didn't mean to show you this, but it's the best way of explaining what I think," Jake said with some diffidence. "I'm weak in technique, because I haven't been taught, but I imagine I've got sensibility. It's plain that when you paint a portrait you must study form and color, but there's something else that you can only feel. I don't mean the character that's expressed by the mouth and eyes; it's something vague and elusive that psychologists give you a hint of when they talk about the *aura*. Of course you can't paint it, but unless it, so to speak, glimmers through the work, your portrait's dead."

"I don't quite understand; but sometimes things do give you an impression you can't analyze," Dick replied.

"Well, allowing for poor workmanship, all you see here's harmonious. The blues and purples and yellows tone, and yet, if I've got the hot glare of the sun right, you feel that the figure's exotic and doesn't belong to the scene. The latter really needs an olive-skinned daughter of the passionate South; but the

girl I've painted ought to walk in the moonlight through cool forest glades."

Dick studied the picture silently, for he remembered with disturbing emotion that he had felt what Jake suggested when he first met Clare Kenwardine. She was frank, but somehow remote and aloof; marked by a strange refinement he could find no name for. He was glad that Jake did not seem to expect him to speak, but after a few moments the latter wrapped up the portrait and took it away. When he came back he lighted a cigarette.

"Now," he said, "do you think it's sensible to distrust a girl like that? Admitting that her father makes a few dollars by gambling, can you believe that living with him throws any taint on her?"

Dick hesitated. Clare had stolen his papers. This seemed impossible, but it was true. Yet when he looked up he answered as his heart urged him:

"No. It sounds absurd."

"It is absurd," Jake said firmly.

Neither spoke for the next minute, and then Dick frowned at a disturbing thought. Could the lad understand Clare so well unless he loved her?

"That picture must have taken some time to paint. Did Miss Kenwardine often pose for you?"

"No," said Jake, rather dryly; "in fact, she didn't really pose at all. I had trouble to get permission to make one or two quick sketches, and worked up the rest from memory."

"Yet she let you sketch her. It was something of a privilege."

Jake smiled in a curious way. "I think I see what you mean. Miss Kenwardine likes me, but although I've some artistic taste, I'm frankly flesh and blood;

and that's not quite her style. She finds me a little more in harmony with her than the rest, but this is all. Still, it's something to me. Now you understand matters, perhaps you won't take so much trouble to keep me out of Santa Brigida."

"I'll do my best to keep you away from Kenwardine," Dick declared.

"Very well," Jake answered with a grin. "You're quite a good sort, though you're not always very smart, and I can't blame you for doing what you think is your duty."

Then he set to work on his calculations and there was silence on the veranda.

Dick kept him occupied for the next week, and then prudently decided not to press the lad too hard by finding him work that obviously need not be done. If he was to preserve his power, it must be used with caution. The first evening Jake was free he started for Santa Brigida, though as there was no longer a locomotive available, he got two laborers to take him down the line on a hand-car. After that he had some distance to walk and arrived at Kenwardine's powdered with dust. It was a hot night and he found Kenwardine and three or four others in the patio.

A small, shaded lamp stood upon the table they had gathered round, and the light sparkled on delicate green glasses and a carafe of wine. It touched the men's white clothes, and then, cut off by the shade, left their faces in shadow and fell upon the tiles. A colored paper lantern, however, hung from a wire near an outside staircase and Jake saw Clare a short distance away. It looked as if she had stopped in crossing the patio, but as he came forward Kenwardine got up.

"It's some time since we have seen you," he remarked.

"Yes," said Jake. "I meant to come before, but couldn't get away."

"Then you have begun to take your business seriously?"

"My guardian does."

"Ah!" said Kenwardine, speaking rather louder, "if you mean Mr. Brandon, I certainly thought him a serious person. But what has this to do with your coming here?"

"He found me work that kept me busy evenings."

"With the object of keeping you out of mischief?"

"I imagine he meant something of the kind," Jake admitted with a chuckle. He glanced round, and felt he had been too frank, as his eyes rested on Clare. He could not see her face, but thought she was listening.

"Then it looks as if he believed we were dangerous people for you to associate with," Kenwardine remarked, with a smile. "Well, I suppose we're not remarkable for the conventional virtues."

Jake, remembering Dick had insisted that Kenwardine was dangerous, felt embarrassed as he noted that Clare was now looking at him. To make things worse, he thought Kenwardine had meant her to hear.

"I expect he really was afraid of my going to the casino," he answered as carelessly as he could.

"Though he would not be much relieved to find you had come to my house instead? Well, I suppose one must make allowances for the Puritan character."

"Brandon isn't much of a Puritan, and he's certainly not a prig," Jake objected.

Kenwardine laughed. "I'm not sure this explana-

tion makes things much better, but we'll let it go. We were talking about the new water supply. It's a harmless subject and you ought to be interested."

Jake sat down and stole a glance at Clare as he drank a glass of wine. There was nothing to be learned from her face, but he was vexed with Kenwardine, who had intentionally involved him in an awkward situation. Jake admitted that he had not dealt with it very well. For all that, he began to talk about the irrigation works and the plans for bringing water to the town, and was relieved to see that Clare had gone when he next looked round.

As a matter of fact, Clare had quietly stolen away and was sitting on a balcony in the dark, tingling with anger and humiliation. She imagined that she had banished Brandon from her thoughts and was alarmed to find that he had still power to wound her. It had been a shock to learn he believed that she had stolen his papers; but he had now warned his companion against her father and no doubt herself. Jake's manner when questioned had seemed to indicate this.

By and by she tried, not to make excuses for Brandon, but to understand his point of view, and was forced to admit that it was not unreasonable. Her father now and then allowed, or perhaps encouraged, his guests to play for high stakes, and she had hated to see the evening gatherings of extravagant young men at their house in England. Indeed, she had eagerly welcomed the change when he had offered to take her abroad because business necessitated his leaving the country. Things had been better at Santa Brigida, but after a time the card playing had begun again. The men who now came to their house were,

however, of a different type from the rather dissipated youths she had previously met. They were quieter and more reserved; men of experience who had known adventure. Still, she disliked their coming and had sometimes felt she must escape from a life that filled her with repugnance. The trouble was that she did not know where to find a refuge and could not force herself to leave her father, who had treated her with good-humored indulgence.

Then she began to wonder what was the business that had brought him to Santa Brigida. He did not talk about it, but she was sure it was not gambling, as Brandon thought. No doubt he won some money from his friends, but it could not be much and he must lose at times. She must look for another explanation and it was hard to find. Men who did not play cards came to the house in the daytime and occasionally late at night, and Kenwardine, who wrote a good many letters, now and then went away down the coast. There was a mystery about his occupation that puzzled and vaguely alarmed her, and she could turn to nobody for advice. She had refused her aunt's offer of a home and knew it would not be renewed. They had cast her off and done with her. Getting up presently with a troubled sigh, she went to her room.

In the meantime, Jake stayed in the patio with the others. A thin, dark Spaniard, who spoke English well, and two Americans occupied the other side of the table; a fat German sat nearly opposite the Spaniard and next to Jake. The heat made them languid and nobody wanted to play cards, although there was a pack on the table. This happened oftener than Brandon thought.

"It's a depressing night and an enervating country," Kenwardine remarked. "I wonder why we stay here as we do, since we're apt to leave it as poor as when we came. The people are an unstable lot, and when you've spent your time and energy developing what you hope is a profitable scheme, some change of policy or leaders suddenly cuts it short."

"I guess that explains why we *are* here," one of the Americans replied. "The South is the home of the dramatic surprise and this appeals to us. In the North, they act by rule and one knows, more or less, what will happen; but this gives one no chances to bet upon."

The fat German nodded. "It is the gambler's point of view. You people take with pleasure steep chances, as they say, but mine act not so. The system is better. One calculates beforehand what may happen and it is provided for. If things do not go as one expects, one labors to change them, and when this is not possible adopts an alternative plan."

"But there always is a plan, Señor Richter!" the Spaniard remarked.

Richter smiled. "With us, I think that is true. Luck is more fickle than a woman and we like not the surprise. But our effort is to be prepared for it."

"You're a pretty hard crowd to run up against," said the other American.

Jake, who had taken no part in the recent talk, and leaned languidly back in his chair, turned his head as he heard footsteps in the patio. They were quick and decided, as if somebody was coming straight towards the table, but they stopped suddenly. This seemed strange and Jake, who had caught a glimpse of a man in white clothes, looked round to see if Kenwardine

had made him a sign. The latter, however, was lighting his pipe, but the Spaniard leaned forward a little, as if trying to see across the patio. Jake thought he would find this difficult with the light of the lamp in his eyes, but Richter, who sat opposite, got up and reached across the table.

"With excuses, Don Sebastian, but the wine is on your side," he said, and filled his glass from the decanter before he sat down.

In the meantime the man who had come in was waiting, but seemed to have moved, because Jake could only see an indistinct figure in the gloom.

"Is that you, Enrique?" Kenwardine asked when he had lighted his pipe.

"*Sí, señor,*" a voice answered, and Kenwardine made a sign of dismissal.

"*Bueno!* You can tell me about it to-morrow. I am engaged now."

The footsteps began again and when they died away Kenwardine picked up the cards.

"Shall we play for half an hour?" he asked.

The others agreed, but the stakes were moderate and nobody took much interest in the game; and Jake presently left the house without seeing anything more of Clare. He felt he had wasted the evening, but as he walked back to the line he thought about the man whom Kenwardine had sent away. He did not think the fellow was one of the servants, and it seemed strange that Richter should have got up and stood in front of Don Sebastian when the latter was trying to see across the patio. Still, there was no apparent reason why the Spaniard should want to see who had come in, and Jake dismissed the matter.

CHAPTER XIII

THE RETURN FROM THE FIESTA

THE sure-footed mules, braced hard against the weight of the carriage, slid down a steep descent across slippery stones when Clare, who wondered what would happen if the worn-out harness broke, rode into Adexe. Gleaming white houses rose one above another among feathery palms, with a broad streak of darker green in their midst to mark the shady alameda. Behind, the dark range towered against the sky; in front lay a foam-fringed beach and the vast blue sweep of dazzling sea. Music came up through the languid murmur of the surf, and the steep streets were filled with people whose clothes made patches of brilliant color. The carriage jolted safely down the hill, and Clare looked about with interest as they turned into the central plaza, where the driver stopped.

"It's a picturesque little town and I'm glad you brought me," she said. "But what does the fiesta they're holding celebrate?"

"I don't know; the first landing of the Spaniards, perhaps," Kenwardine replied. "Anyhow, it's a popular function, and as everybody in the neighborhood takes part in it, I came with the object of meeting some people I do business with. In fact, I may have to leave you for a time with the wife of a Spaniard whom I know."

When coming down the hillside Clare had noticed

a sugar mill and an ugly coaling wharf that ran out into the bay. Two steamers lay not far off, rolling gently on the glittering swell, and several lighters were moored against the wharf. Since she had never heard him speak of coal, she imagined her father's business was with the sugar mill, but he seldom talked to her about such matters and she did not ask. He took her to an old, yellow house, with tarnished brass rails barring its lower windows and a marble fountion in the patio, where brilliant creepers hung from the balconies. The soft splash of falling water was soothing and the spray cooled the air.

"It is very pretty," Clare said while they waited. "I wish we could make our patio like this."

"We may be able to do so when Brandon and his friends bring us the water," Kenwardine replied with a quick glance at the girl. "Have you seen him recently?"

"Not for three or four weeks," said Clare.

There was nothing to be learned from her face, but Kenwardine noted a hint of coldness in her voice. Next moment, however, a stout lady in a black dress, and a thin, brown-faced Spaniard came down to meet them. Kenwardine presented Clare, and for a time they sat on a balcony, talking in a mixture of French and Castilian. Then a man came up the outside staircase and took off his hat as he turned to Kenwardine. He had a swarthy skin, but Clare carelessly remarked that the hollows about his eyes were darker than the rest of his face, as if they had been overlooked in a hurried wash, and his bare feet were covered with fine, black dust.

"Don Martin waits you, señor," he said.

Kenwardine excused himself to his hostess, and after promising to return before long went away with the man.

"Who is Don Martin, and does he own the coaling wharf?" Clare asked.

"No," said the Spaniard. "What makes you imagine so?"

"There was some coal-dust on his messenger."

The Spaniard laughed. "Your eyes are as keen as they are bright, señorita, but your father spoke of business and he does not deal in coal. They use it for the engine at the sugar mill."

"Could I follow him to the mill? I would like to see how they extract the sugar from the cane."

"It is not a good day for that; the machinery will not be running," said the Spaniard, who looked at his wife.

"I meant to take you to the cathedral. Everybody goes on the fiesta," the lady broke in.

Clare agreed. She suspected that her father had not gone to the sugar mill, but this did not matter, and she presently left the house with her hostess. The small and rather dark cathedral was crowded, and Clare, who understood very little of what went on, was impressed by the close rows of kneeling figures, while the candles glimmering through the incense, and the music, had their effect. She came out in a thoughtful mood, partly dazzled by the change of light, and it was with something of a shock she stopped to avoid collision with a man at the bottom of the steps. It was Brandon, and she noted that he looked well again, but although they were face to face and he waited with his eyes fixed on her, she turned away and spoke

to her companion. Dick crossed the street with his hand clenched and his face hot, but felt that he had deserved his rebuff. He could not expect Miss Kenwardine to meet him as a friend.

An hour or two later, Kenwardine returned to the house with Richter, the German, and said he found he must drive to a village some distance off to meet an official whom he had expected to see in the town. He doubted if he could get back that night, but a sailing barquillo would take passengers to Santa Brigida, and Clare could go home by her. The girl made no objection when she heard that two French ladies, whom she knew, were returning by the boat, and stayed with her hostess when Kenwardine and Richter left. Towards evening the Spaniard came in and stated that the barquillo had sailed earlier than had been announced, but a steam launch was going to Santa Brigida with some friends of his on board and he could get Clare a passage if she would sooner go. Señor Kenwardine, he added, might drive home by another road without calling there again.

Half an hour later Clare went with him to the coaling wharf, where a launch lay at some steps. A few people were already on board, and her host left after putting her in charge of a Spanish lady. The girl imagined that he was glad to get rid of her, and thought there was something mysterious about her father's movements. Something he had not expected must have happened, because he would not have brought her if he had known he could not take her home. It was, however, not a long run to Santa Brigida, by sea, and the launch, which had a powerful engine, looked fast.

In another few minutes a man came down the steps and threw off a rope before he jumped on board. Taking off his hat to the passengers, he started the engine and sat down at the helm. Clare did not see his face until the launch was gliding away from the wharf, and then hid her annoyance and surprise, for it was Brandon. His eyes rested on her for a moment as he glanced about the boat, but she saw he did not expect recognition. Perhaps she had been wrong when she passed him outside the cathedral, but it was now too late to change her attitude.

The water was smooth, the sun had sunk behind the range, and a warm breeze that ruffled the shining surface with silky ripples blew off the shore. The rumble of the surf came in a deep undertone through the throb of the engine, and the launch sped on with a frothy wave curling at her bows. Now and then Clare glanced quickly at the helmsman, who sat with his arm thrown round the tiller. She thought he looked disturbed, and felt sorry, though she told herself that she had done the proper thing.

After a time the launch swung in towards the beach and stopped at a rude landing behind a reef. Houses showed among the trees not far off and Clare thought this was the pueblo of Arenas. Then she was disturbed to see that all her companions were going to land. When the Spanish lady said good-by she got up, with the idea of following the rest, but Dick stopped her.

"Do you expect Mr. Kenwardine to meet you?" he asked.

"No. I was told the launch was going to Santa Brigida, but didn't know that she was yours."

Dick eyes twinkled. "I am going to Santa Brigida and the boat is one we use, but my colored fireman refused to leave the fiesta. Now you can't stay at Arenas, and I doubt if you can get a mule to take you home, because they'll all have gone to Adexe. But, if you like, we'll go ashore and try."

"You don't think I could find a carriage?" Clare asked irresolutely, seeing that if she now showed herself determined to avoid him, it would be humiliating to be forced to fall back upon his help.

"I don't. Besides, it's some distance to Santa Brigida over a rough, steep road that you'd find very awkward in the dark, while as I can land you in an hour, it seems unnecessary for you to leave the boat here."

"Yes," said Clare, "perhaps it is."

Dick threw some coal into the furnace, and restarted the launch. The throb of the engine was quicker than before, and when a jet of steam blew away from the escape-pipe Clare imagined that he meant to lose no time. She glanced at him as he sat at the helm with a moody face; and then away at the black hills that slid past. The silence was embarrassing and she wondered whether he would break it. On the whole, she wanted him to do so, but would give him no help.

"Of course," he said at length, "you needn't talk if you'd sooner not. But you gave me the cut direct in Adexe, and although I may have deserved it, it hurt."

"I don't see why it should hurt," Clare answered coldly.

"Don't you?" he asked. "Well, you have the right

to choose your acquaintances; but I once thought we were pretty good friends and I mightn't have got better if you hadn't taken care of me. That ought to count for something."

Clare blushed, but her eyes sparkled and her glance was steady. "If we are to have an explanation, it must be complete and without reserve. Very well! Why did you change when you were getting better? And why did you hint that I must know you hadn't stolen the plans?"

Dick studied her with some surprise. He had thought her gentle and trustful, but saw that she burned with imperious anger. It certainly was not acting and contradicted the supposition of her guilt.

"If I did hint anything of the kind, I must have been a bit light-headed," he answered awkwardly. "You get morbid fancies when you have fever."

"The fever had nearly gone. You were braver then than you seem to be now."

"I suppose that's true. Sometimes a shock gives you pluck and I got a nasty one as I began to remember things."

Both were silent for the next few moments. Clare's pose was tense and her look strained, but her anger had vanished. Dick thought she was calmer than himself, but after all, she was, so to speak, on her defense and her part was easier than his. He had forgiven her for robbing him; Kenwardine had forced her to do so, and Dick regretted he had not hidden his knowledge of the deed she must have hated. It was bodily weakness that had led him to show his suspicion, but he knew that if they were to be friends again no reserve was possible. As Clare had said, the ex-

planation must be complete. It was strange, after what had happened, that he should want her friendship, but he did want it, more than anything else. Yet she must be told plainly what he had thought her. He shrank from the task.

"What did you remember?" Clare asked, forcing herself to look at him.

"That I had the plans in the left, top pocket of my uniform when I reached your house; I felt to see if they were there as I came up the drive," he answered doggedly. "Soon afterward, you slipped as we went down the steps into the garden and in clutching me your hand caught and pulled the pocket open. It was a deep pocket and the papers could not have fallen out."

"So you concluded that I had stolen them!" Clare said in a cold, strained voice, though her face flushed crimson.

"What else could I think?"

Then, though she tried to hide the breakdown, Clare's nerve gave way. She had forced the crisis in order to clear herself, but saw that she could not do so. Dick's statement was convincing; the papers had been stolen while he was in their house, and she had a horrible suspicion that her father was the thief. It came with a shock, though she had already been tormented by a vague fear of the truth that she had resolutely refused to face. She remembered the men who were at the house on the eventful night. They were somewhat dissipated young sportsmen and not remarkable for intelligence. None of them was likely to take part in such a plot.

"You must understand what a serious thing you are

saying," she faltered, trying to doubt him and finding that she could not.

"I do," he said, regarding her with gravely pitiful eyes. "Still, you rather forced it out of me. Perhaps this is a weak excuse, because I had meant to forget the matter."

"But didn't you want to clear yourself and get taken back?"

"No; I knew it was too late. I'd shown I couldn't be trusted with an important job; and I'd made a fresh start here."

His answer touched the girl, and after a quick half-ashamed glance, she thought she had misjudged him. It was not her physical charm that had made him willing to condone her offense, for he showed none of the bold admiration she had shrunk from in other men. Instead, he was compassionate and, she imagined, anxious to save her pain.

She did not answer and turning her head, vacantly watched the shore slide past. The mountains were growing blacker, trails of mist that looked like gauze gathered in the ravines, and specks of light began to pierce the gloom ahead. They marked Santa Brigida, and something must still be said before the launch reached port. It was painful that Brandon should take her guilt for granted, but she feared to declare her innocence.

"You were hurt when I passed you at Adexe," she remarked, without looking at him. "You must, however, see that friendship between us is impossible while you think me a thief."

"I must try to explain," Dick said slowly. "When I recovered my senses at your house after being ill,

I felt I must get away as soon as possible, though I ought to have remembered only that you had taken care of me. Still, you see, my mind was weak just then. Afterwards I realized how ungratefully I had behaved. The plans didn't matter; they weren't really of much importance, and I knew if you had taken them, it was because your were forced. That made all the difference; in a way, you were not to blame. I'm afraid," he concluded lamely, "I haven't made it very clear."

Clare was moved by his naïve honesty, which seemed to be guarded by something finer than common sense. After all, he had made things clear. He owned that he believed she had taken the plans, and yet he did not think her a thief. On the surface, this was rather involved, but she saw what he meant. Still, it did not carry them very far.

"It is not long since you warned Mr. Fuller against us," she resumed.

"Not against you; that would have been absurd. However, Jake's something of a gambler and your father's friends play for high stakes. The lad was put in my hands by people who trusted me to look after him. I had to justify their confidence."

"Of course. But you must understand that my father and I stand together. What touches him, touches me."

Dick glanced ahead. The lights of Santa Brigida had drawn out in a broken line, and those near the beach were large and bright. A hundred yards away, two twinkling, yellow tracks stretched across the water from the shadowy bulk of a big cargo boat. Farther on, he could see the black end of the mole washed by

frothy surf. There was little time for further talk and no excuse for stopping the launch.

"That's true in a sense," he agreed with forced quietness. "I've done you an injustice, Miss Kenwardine; so much is obvious, but I can't understand the rest just yet. I suppose I mustn't ask you to forget the line I took?"

"We can't be friends as if nothing had happened."

Dick made a gesture of moody acquiescence. "Well, perhaps something will clear up the matter by and by. I must wait, because while it's difficult now, I feel it will come right."

A minute or two later he ran the launch alongside a flight of steps on the mole, and helping Clare to land went with her to her house. They said nothing on the way, but she gave him her hand when he left her at the door.

CHAPTER XIV

COMPLICATIONS

IT was dark outside the feeble lamplight, and very hot, when Dick sat on his veranda after a day of keen activity in the burning sun. He felt slack and jaded, for he had had difficult work to do and his dusky laborers had flagged under the unusual heat. There was now no touch of coolness in the stagnant air, and although the camp down the valley was very quiet a confused hum of insects came out of the jungle. It rose and fell with a monotonous regularity that jarred upon Dick's nerves as he forced himself to think.

He was in danger of falling in love with Clare Kenwardine; indeed, he suspected that it would be better to face the truth and admit that he had already done so. The prudent course would be to fight against and overcome his infatuation; but suppose he found this impossible, as he feared? It seemed certain that she had stolen his papers; but after all he did not hold her accountable. Some day he would learn more about the matter and find that she was blameless. He had been a fool to think harshly of her, but he knew now that his first judgment was right. Clare, who could not have done anything base and treacherous, was much too good for him. This, however, was not the subject with which he meant to occupy himself, because

if he admitted that he hoped to marry Clare, there were serious obstacles in his way.

To begin with, he had made it difficult, if not impossible, for the girl to treat him with the friendliness she had previously shown; besides which, Kenwardine would, no doubt, try to prevent his meeting her, and his opposition would be troublesome. Then it was plainly desirable that she should be separated from her father, who might involve her in his intrigues, because there was ground for believing that he was a dangerous man. In the next place, Dick was far from being able to support a wife accustomed to the extravagance that Kenwardine practised. It might be long before he could offer her the lowest standard of comfort necessary for an Englishwoman in a hot, foreign country.

He felt daunted, but not altogether hopeless, and while he pondered the matter Bethune came in. On the whole, Dick found his visit a relief.

"I expect you'll be glad to hear we can keep the machinery running," Bethune said as he sat down.

Dick nodded. Their fuel was nearly exhausted, for owing to strikes and shortage of shipping Fuller had been unable to keep them supplied.

"Then you have got some coal? As there's none at Santa Brigida just now, where's it coming from?"

"Adexe. Four big lighter loads. Stuyvesant has given orders to have them towed round."

"I understood the Adexe people didn't keep a big stock. The wharf is small."

"So did I, but it seems that Kenwardine came to Stuyvesant and offered him as much as he wanted."

"Kenwardine!" Dick exclaimed.

Bethune lighted his pipe. "Yes, Kenwardine. As the wharf's supposed to be owned by Spaniards, I don't see what he has to do with it, unless he's recently bought them out. Anyhow, it's high-grade navigation coal."

"Better stuff than we need, but the difference in price won't matter if we can keep the concrete mill going," Dick remarked thoughtfully. "Still, it's puzzling. If Kenwardine has bought the wharf, why's he sending the coal away, instead of using it in the regular bunkering trade?"

"There's a hint of mystery about the matter. I expect you heard about the collier tramp that was consigned to the French company at Arucas? Owing to some dispute, they wouldn't take the cargo and the shippers put it on the market. Fuller tried to buy some, but found that another party had got the lot. Well, Stuyvesant believes it was the German, Richter, who bought it up."

"Jake tells me that Richter's a friend of Kenwardine's."

"I didn't know about that," said Bethune. "They may have bought the cargo for some particular purpose, for which they afterwards found it wouldn't be required, and now want to sell some off."

"Then Kenwardine must have more money than I thought."

"The money may be Richter's," Bethune replied. "However, since we'll now have coal enough to last until Fuller sends some out, I don't know that we have any further interest in the matter."

He glanced keenly at Dick's thoughtful face; and then, as the latter did not answer, talked about some-

thing else until he got up to go. After he had gone, Dick leaned back in his chair with a puzzled frown. He had met Richter and rather liked him, but the fellow was a German, and it was strange that he should choose an English partner for his speculations, as he seemed to have done. But while Kenwardine was English, Dick's papers had been stolen at his house, and his distrust of the man grew stronger. There was something suspicious about this coal deal, but he could not tell exactly what his suspicions pointed to, and by and by he took up the plan of a culvert they were to begin next morning.

A few days later, Jake and he sat, one night, in the stern of the launch, which lay head to sea about half a mile from the Adexe wharf. The promised coal had not arrived, and, as fuel was running very short at the concrete mill, Dick had gone to see that a supply was sent. It was late when he reached Adexe, and found nobody in authority about, but three loaded lighters were moored at the wharf, and a gang of peons were trimming the coal that was being thrown on board another. Ahead of the craft lay a small tug with steam up. As the half-breed foreman declared that he did not know whether the coal was going to Santa Brigida or not, Dick boarded the tug and found her Spanish captain drinking caña with his engineer. Dick thought one looked at the other meaningly as he entered the small, hot cabin.

"I suppose it's Señor Fuller's coal in the barges, and we're badly in want of it," he said. "As you have steam up, you'll start soon."

"We start, yes," answered the skipper, who spoke some English, and then paused and shrugged. "I

do not know if we get to Santa Brigida to-night."

"Why?" Dick asked. "There's not very much wind, and it's partly off the land."

The half-breed engineer described in uncouth Castilian the difficulties he had had with a defective pump and leaking glands, and Dick, who did not understand much of it, went back to his launch. Stopping the craft a short distance from the harbor, he said to Jake: "We'll wait until they start. Somehow I don't think they meant to leave to-night if I hadn't turned them out."

Jake looked to windward. There was a moon in the sky, which was, however, partly obscured by driving clouds. The breeze was strong, but, blowing obliquely off the land did not ruffle the sea much near the beach. A long swell, however, worked in, and farther out the white tops of the combers glistened in the moonlight. Now and then a fresher gust swept off the shadowy coast and the water frothed in angry ripples about the launch.

"They ought to make Santa Brigida, though they'll find some sea running when they reach off-shore to go round the Tajada reef," he remarked.

"There's water enough through the inside channel."

"That's so," Jake agreed. "Still, it's narrow and bad to find in the dark, and I expect the skipper would sooner go outside." Then he glanced astern and said, "They're coming out."

Two white lights, one close above the other, with a pale red glimmer below, moved away from the wharf. Behind them three or four more twinkling red spots appeared, and Dick told the fireman to start

the engine half-speed. Steering for the beach, he followed the fringe of surf, but kept abreast of the tug, which held to a course that would take her round the end of the reef.

When the moon shone through he could see her plunge over the steep swell and the white wash at the lighters' bows as they followed in her wake; then as a cloud drove past, their dark hulls faded and left nothing but a row of tossing lights. By and by the launch reached a bend in the coastline and the breeze freshened and drew more ahead. The swell began to break and showers of spray blew on board, while the sea got white off-shore.

"We'll get it worse when we open up the Arenas bight," said Jake as he glanced at the lurching tug. "It looks as if the skipper meant to give the reef a wide berth. He's swinging off to starboard. Watch his smoke."

"You have done some yachting, then?"

"I have," said Jake. "I used to sail a shoal-draught sloop on Long Island Sound. Anyway, if I'd been towing those coal-scows, I'd have edged in near the beach, for the sake of smoother water, and wouldn't have headed out until I saw the reef. It will be pretty wet on board the scows now, and they'll have had to put a man on each to steer."

Dick nodded agreement and signed the fireman to turn on more steam as he followed the tug out-shore. The swell got steadily higher and broke in angry surges. The launch plunged, and rattled as she swung her screw out of the sea, but Dick kept his course abreast of the tug, which he could only distinguish at intervals between the clouds of spray. Her mast-

head lights reeled wildly to and fro, but the low red gleam from the barges was hidden and he began to wonder why her captain was steering out so far. It was prudent not to skirt the reef, but the fellow seemed to be giving it unnecessary room. The lighters would tow badly through the white, curling sea, and there was a risk of the hawsers breaking. Besides, the engineer had complained that his machinery was not running well.

A quarter of an hour later, a belt of foam between them and the land marked the reef, and the wind brought off the roar of breaking surf. Soon afterwards, the white surge faded, and only the tug's lights were left as a long cloud-bank drove across the moon. Jake stood up, shielding his eyes from the spray.

"He's broken his rope; the coal's adrift!" he cried.

Dick saw the tug's lights vanish, which meant that she had turned with her stern towards the launch; and then two or three twinkling specks some distance off.

"He'd tow the first craft with a double rope, a bridle from his quarters," he said. "It's strange that both parts broke, and, so far as I can make out, the tail barge has parted her hawser, too."

A whistle rang out, and Dick called for full-speed as the tug's green light showed.

"We'll help him to pick up the barges," he remarked.

The moon shone out as they approached the nearest, and a bright beam swept across the sea until it touched the lurching craft. Her wet side glistened about a foot above the water and then vanished as a white surge lapped over it and washed across her

deck. A rope trailed from her bow and her long tiller jerked to and fro. It was obvious that she was adrift with nobody on board, and Dick cautiously steered the launch towards her.

"That's curious, but perhaps the rest drove foul of her and the helmsman lost his nerve and jumped," he said. "I'll put Maccario on board to give us the hawser."

"Then I'll go with him," Jake offered. "He can't handle the big rope alone."

Dick hesitated. It was important that they should not lose the coal, but he did not want to give the lad a dangerous task. The barge was rolling wildly and he durst not run alongside, while some risk would attend a jump across the three or four feet of water between the craft.

"I think you'd better stop here," he objected.

"I don't," Jake answered with a laugh. "Guess you've got to be logical. You want the coal, and it will take us both to save it."

He followed the fireman, who stood, balancing himself for a spring, on the forward deck, while Dick let the launch swing in as close as he thought safe. The man leapt and Dick watched Jake with keen anxiety as the launch rose with the next comber, but the lad sprang off as the bows went up, and came down with a splash in the water that flowed across the lighter's deck. Then Dick caught the line thrown him and with some trouble dragged the end of the hawser on board. He was surprised to find that it was not broken, but he waved his hand to the others as he drove the launch ahead, steering for the beach, near which he expected to find a passage through the reef.

Before he had gone far the tug steamed towards him with the other barges in tow, apparently bound for Adexe.

"It is not possible to go on," the skipper hailed. "Give me a rope; we take the lighter."

"You shan't take her to Adexe," Dick shouted. "We want the coal."

Though there was danger in getting too close, the captain let the tug drift nearer.

"We bring you the lot when the wind drops."

"No," said Dick, "I'll stick to what I've got."

He could not catch the captain's reply as the tug forged past, but it sounded like an exclamation of anger or surprise, and he looked anxiously for the foam upon the reef. It was some time before he distinguished a glimmer in the dark, for the moon was hidden and his progress was slow. The lighter was big and heavily laden, and every now and then her weight, putting a sudden strain on the hawser, jerked the launch to a standstill. It was worse when, lifting with the swell, she sheered off at an angle to her course, and Dick was forced to maneuver with helm and engine to bring her in line again, at some risk of fouling the hawser with the screw. He knew little about towing, but he had handled small sailing boats before he learned to use the launch. The coal was badly needed and must be taken to Santa Brigida, though an error of judgment might lead to the loss of the barge and perhaps of his comrade's life.

The phosphorescent gleam of the surf got plainer and the water smoother, for the reef was now to windward and broke the sea, but the moon was still covered, and Dick felt some tension as he skirted the

barrier. He did not know if he could find the opening or tow the lighter through the narrow channel. The surf, however, was of help, for it flashed into sheets of spangled radiance as it washed across the reef, leaving dark patches among the lambent foam. The patches had a solid look, and Dick knew that they were rocks.

At length he saw a wider break in the belt of foam, and the sharper plunging of the launch showed that the swell worked through. This was the mouth of the channel, and there was water enough to float the craft if he could keep off the rocks. Snatching the engine-lamp from its socket, he waved it and blew the whistle. A shout reached him and showed that the others understood.

Dick felt his nerves tingle when he put the helm over and the hawser tightened as the lighter began to swing. If she took too wide a sweep, he might be unable to check her before she struck the reef, and there seemed to be a current flowing through the gap. Glancing astern for a moment, he saw her dark hull swing through a wide curve while the strain on the hawser dragged the launch's stern down, but she came round and the tension slackened as he steered up the channel.

For a time he had less trouble than he expected; but the channel turned at its outer end and wind and swell would strike at him at an awkward angle, when he took the bend. As he entered it, the moon shone out, and he saw the black top of a rock dangerously close to leeward. He waved the lantern, but the lighter, with sea and current on her weather bow, forged almost straight ahead, and the straining hawser

dragged the launch back. Reaching forward, Dick opened the throttle valve to its limit, and then sat grim and still while the throb of the screw shook the trembling hull. Something would happen in the next half minute unless he could get the lighter round. Glancing back, he saw her low, wet side shine in the moonlight. Two dark figures stood aft by the tiller, and he thought the foam about the rock was only a fathom or two away.

The launch was hove down on her side. Though the screw thudded furiously, she seemed to gain no ground, and then the strain on the hawser suddenly slackened. Dick wondered whether it had broken, but he would know in the next few seconds; there was a sharp jerk, the launch was dragged to leeward, but recovered and forged ahead. She plunged her bows into a broken swell and the spray filled Dick's eyes, but when he could see again the foam was sliding past and a gap widened between the lighter's hull and the white wash on the rock.

The water was deep ahead, and since he could skirt the beach and the wind came strongly off the land, the worst of his difficulties seemed to be past. Still, it would be a long tow to Santa Brigida, and bracing himself for the work, he lit his pipe.

CHAPTER XV

THE MISSING COAL

EARLY next morning Dick stood in front of the Hotel Magellan, where he had slept for a few hours after his return, and was somewhat surprised to see that Jake had got up before him and was talking to a pretty, dark-skinned girl. She carried a large bunch of flowers and a basket of fruit stood close by, while Jake seemed to be persuading her to part with some.

Dick stopped and watched them, for the glow of color held his eye. Jake's white duck caught the strong sunlight, while the girl's dark hair and eyes were relieved by the brilliant lemon-tinted wall and the mass of crimson bloom. Her attitude was coquettish, and Jake regarded her with an ingratiating smile. After a few moments, however, Dick went down the street and presently heard his comrade following him. When the lad came up, he saw that he had a basket of dark green fruit and a bunch of the red flowers.

"I thought you were asleep. Early rising is not a weakness of yours," he said.

"As it happens, I didn't sleep at all," Jake replied. "Steering that unhandy coal-scow rather got upon my nerves and when she took the awkward sheer as we came through the reef the tiller knocked Maccario down and nearly broke my ribs. I had to stop the helm going the wrong way somehow."

Dick nodded. It was obvious that the lad had been quick and cool at a critical time, but his twinkling smile showed that he was now in a different mood.

"You seem to have recovered. But why couldn't you leave the girl alone?"

"I'm not sure she'd have liked that," Jake replied. "It's a pity you have no artistic taste, or you might have seen what a picture she made."

"As a matter of fact, I did see it, but she has, no doubt, a half-breed lover who'd seriously misunderstand your admiration, which might lead to your getting stabbed some night. Anyhow, why did you buy the flowers?"

"For one thing, she was taking them to the Magellan, and I couldn't stand for seeing that blaze of color wasted on the guzzling crowd you generally find in a hotel dining-room."

"That doesn't apply to the fruit. You can't eat those things. They preserve them."

"Eat them!" Jake exclaimed with a pitying look. "Well, I suppose it's the only use you have for fruit." He took a stalk fringed with rich red bloom and laid it across the dark green fruit, which was packed among glossy leaves. "Now, perhaps, you'll see why I bought it. I rather think it makes a dainty offering."

"Ah!" said Dick. "To whom do you propose to offer it?"

"Miss Kenwardine," Jake replied with a twinkle; "though of course her proper color's Madonna blue."

Dick said nothing, but walked on, and when Jake asked where he was going, answered shortly: "To the telephone."

"Well," said Jake, "knowing you as I do, I sus-

pected something of the kind. With the romance of the South all round you, you can't rise above concrete and coal."

He followed Dick to the public telephone office and sat down in the box with the flowers in his hands. A line had recently been run along the coast, and although the service was bad, Dick, after some trouble, got connected with a port official at Arenas.

"Did a tug and three coal barges put into your harbor last night?" he asked.

"No, señor," was the answer, and Dick asked for the coal wharf at Adexe.

"Why didn't you call them first?" Jake inquired.

"I had a reason. The tug was standing to leeward when she left us, but if her skipper meant to come back to Santa Brigida, he'd have to put into Arenas, where he'd find shelter."

"Then you're not sure he meant to come back?"

"I've some doubts," Dick answered dryly, and was told that he was connected with the Adexe wharf.

"What about the coal for the Fuller irrigation works?" he asked.

"The tug and four lighters left last night," somebody answered in Castilian, and Dick imagined from the harshness of the voice that one of the wharf-hands was speaking.

"That is so," he said. "Has she returned yet?"

"No, señor," said the man. "The tug ——"

He broke off, and there was silence for some moments, after which a different voice took up the conversation in English.

"Sorry it may be a day or two before we can send more of your coal. The tug's engines ——"

"Has she got back?" Dick demanded sharply.

"Speak louder; I cannot hear."

Dick did so, but the other did not seem to understand.

"In two or three days. You have one lighter."

"We have. I want to know if the tug——"

"The damage is not serious," the other broke in.

"Then I'm to understand she's back in port?"

A broken murmur answered, but by and by Dick caught the words, "Not longer than two days."

Then he rang off, and pushing Jake's chair out of the way, shut the door.

"It's plain that they don't mean to tell me what I want to know," he remarked. "The first man might have told the truth, if they had let him, but somebody pulled him away. My opinion is that the tug's not at Adexe and didn't go there."

They went back to the hotel, and Dick sat down on a bench in the patio and lighted his pipe.

"There's something very curious about the matter," he said.

"When the tug left us she seemed to be heading farther off shore than was necessary," Jake agreed. "Still, the broken water wouldn't matter so much when she had the wind astern."

"Her skipper wouldn't run off his course and lengthen the distance because the wind was fair."

"No, I don't suppose he would."

"Well," said Dick, "my impression is that he didn't mean to start at all, and wouldn't have done so if I hadn't turned him out."

Jake laughed. "After all, there's no use in making a mystery out of nothing. The people offered us the

coal, and you don't suspect a dark plot to stop the works. What would they gain by that?"

"Nothing that I can see. I don't think they meant to stop the works; but they wanted the coal. It's not at Adexe, and there's no other port the tug could reach. Where has it gone?"

"It doesn't seem to matter, so long as we get a supply before our stock runs out."

"Try to look at the thing as I do," Dick insisted with a frown. "I forced the skipper to go to sea, and as soon as he had a good excuse his tow-rope parted, besides which the last barge went adrift from the rest. Her hawser, however, wasn't broken. It was slipped from the craft she was made fast to. Then, though the tug's engines were out of order, she steamed to leeward very fast and, I firmly believe, hasn't gone back to Adexe."

"I expect there's a very simple explanation," Jake replied. "The truth is you have a rather senseless suspicion of Kenwardine."

"I'll own I don't trust him," Dick answered quietly.

Jake made an impatient gesture. "Let's see if we can get breakfast, because I'm going to his house afterwards."

"They won't have got up yet."

"It's curious that you don't know more about their habits after living there. Miss Kenwardine goes out with Lucille before the sun gets hot, and her father's about as early as you are."

"What does he do in the morning?"

"I haven't inquired, but I've found him in the room

he calls his office. You're misled by the idea that his occupation is gambling."

Dick did not reply, and was silent during breakfast. He understood Jake's liking for Kenwardine because there was no doubt the man had charm. His careless, genial air set one at one's ease; he had a pleasant smile, and a surface frankness that inspired confidence. Dick admitted that if he had not lost the plans at his house, he would have found it difficult to suspect him. But Jake was right on one point; Kenwardine might play for high stakes, but gambling was not his main occupation. He had some more important business. The theft of the plans, however, offered no clue to this. Kenwardine was an adventurer and might have thought he could sell the drawings, but since he had left England shortly afterwards, it was evident that he was not a regular foreign spy. It was some relief to think so, and although there was a mystery about the coal, which Dick meant to fathom if he could, nothing indicated that Kenwardine's trickery had any political aim.

Dick dismissed the matter and remembered with half-jealous uneasiness that Jake seemed to know a good deal about Kenwardine's household. The lad, of course, had gone to make inquiries when he was ill, and had probably been well received. He was very little younger than Clare, and Fuller was known to be rich. It would suit Kenwardine if Jake fell in love with the girl, and if not, his extravagance might be exploited. For all that, Dick determined that his comrade should not be victimized.

When breakfast was over they left the hotel and

presently met Clare, who was followed by Lucille carrying a basket. She looked very fresh and cool in her white dress. On the whole, Dick would sooner have avoided the meeting, but Jake stopped and Clare included Dick in her smile of greeting.

"I have been to the market with Lucille," she said. "The fruit and the curious things they have upon the stalls are worth seeing. But you seem to have been there, though I did not notice you."

"No," said Jake, indicating the flowers and fruit he carried. "I got these at the hotel. The colors matched so well that I felt I couldn't let them go, and then it struck me that you might like them. Dick warned me that the things are not eatable in their present state, which is a pretty good example of his utilitarian point of view."

Clare laughed as she thanked him, and he resumed: "Lucille has enough to carry, and I'd better bring the basket along."

"Very well," said Clare. "My father was getting up when I left."

Dick said nothing, and stood a yard or two away. The girl had met him without embarrassment, but it was Jake she had addressed. He felt that he was, so to speak, being left out.

"Then I'll come and talk to him for a while," said Jake. "I don't know a nicer place on a hot morning than your patio."

"But what about your work? Are you not needed at the dam?"

"My work can wait. I find from experience that it will keep for quite a long time without shriveling away, though often it gets very stale. Anyhow, after

being engaged on the company's business for the most part of last night, I'm entitled to a rest. My partner, of course, doesn't look at things like that. He's going back as fast as he can."

Dick hid his annoyance at the hint. It was impossible to prevent the lad from going to Kenwardine's when Clare was there to hear his objections, and he had no doubt that Jake enjoyed his embarrassment. Turning away, he tried to forget the matter by thinking about the coal. Since Kenwardine was at home, it was improbable that he had been at Adexe during the night. If Clare had a part in her father's plots, she might, of course, have made the statement about his getting up with an object, but Dick would not admit this. She had helped the man once, but this was an exception, and she must have yielded to some very strong pressure. For all that, Dick hoped his comrade would not tell Kenwardine much about their trip in the launch.

As a matter of fact, Jake handled the subject with some judgment when Kenwardine, who had just finished his breakfast, gave him coffee in the patio. They sat beneath the purple creeper while the sunshine crept down the opposite wall. The air was fresh and the murmur of the surf came languidly across the flat roofs.

"Aren't you in town unusually early?" Kenwardine asked.

"Well," said Jake with a twinkle, "you see we got here late."

"Then Brandon was with you. This makes it obvious that you spent a perfectly sober night."

Jake laughed. He liked Kenwardine and meant

to stick to him, but although rash and extravagant, he was sometimes shrewd, and admitted that there might perhaps be some ground for Dick's suspicions. He was entitled to lose his own money, but he must run no risk of injuring his father's business. However, since Kenwardine had a share in the coaling wharf, he would learn that they had been to Adexe, and to try to hide this would show that they distrusted him.

"Our occupation was innocent but rather arduous," he said. "We went to Adexe in the launch to see when our coal was coming."

"Did you get it? The manager told me something about the tug's engines needing repairs."

"We got one scow that broke adrift off the Tajada reef. They had to turn back with the others."

"Then perhaps I'd better telephone to find out what they mean to do," Kenwardine suggested.

Jake wondered whether he wished to learn if they had already made inquiries, and thought frankness was best.

"Brandon called up the wharf as soon as the office was open, but didn't get much information. Something seemed to be wrong with the wire."

"I suppose he wanted to know when the coal would leave?"

"Yes," said Jake. "But he began by asking if the tug had come back safe, and got no further, because the other fellow couldn't hear."

"Why was he anxious about the tug?"

Kenwardine's manner was careless, but Jake imagined he felt more interest than he showed.

"It was blowing pretty fresh when she left us, and

if the scows had broken adrift again, there'd have been some risk of losing them. This would delay the delivery of the coal, and we're getting very short of fuel."

"I see," said Kenwardine. "Well, if anything of the kind had happened, I would have heard of it. You needn't be afraid of not getting a supply."

Jake waited. He thought it might look significant if he showed any eagerness to change the subject, but when Kenwardine began to talk about something else he followed his lead. Half an hour later he left the house, feeling that he had used commendable tact, but determined not to tell Brandon about the interview. Dick had a habit of exaggerating the importance of things, and since he already distrusted Kenwardine, Jake thought it better not to give him fresh ground for suspicion. There was no use in supplying his comrade with another reason for preventing his going to the house.

CHAPTER XVI

JAKE GETS INTO DIFFICULTIES

DAY was breaking, though it was still dark at the foot of the range, when Dick returned wearily to his iron shack after a night's work at the dam. There had been a local subsidence of the foundations on the previous afternoon, and he could not leave the spot until precautions had been taken to prevent the danger spreading. Bethune came with him to look at some plans, and on entering the veranda they were surprised to find the house well lighted and smears of mud and water upon the floor.

"Looks as if a bathing party had been walking round the shack, and your boy had tried to clean up when he was half-asleep," Bethune said.

Dick called his colored servant and asked him: "Why are all the lights burning, and what's this mess?"

"Señor Fuller say he no could see the chairs."

"Why did he want to see them?"

"He fall on one, señor; t'row it wit' mucha force and fall on it again. Say dozenas of *malditos sillas.* If he fall other time, he kill my head."

"Ah!" said Dick sharply. "Where is he now?"

"He go in your bed, señor."

"What has happened is pretty obvious," Bethune remarked. "Fuller came home with a big jag on

and scared this fellow. We'd better see if he's all right."

Dick took him into his bedroom and the negro followed. The room was very hot and filled with a rank smell of kerosene, for the lamp was smoking and the negro explained that Jake had threatened him with violence if he turned it down. The lad lay with a flushed face on Dick's bed; his muddy boots sticking out from under the crumpled coverlet. He seemed to be fully dressed and his wet clothes were smeared with foul green slime. There was a big red lump on his forehead.

"Why didn't you put him into his own bed?" Dick asked the negro.

"He go in, señor, and come out quick. Say no possible he stop. *Maldito* bed is damp."

Bethune smiled. "There'll be a big washbasket for the *lavenderas* to-morrow, but we must take his wet clothes off." He shook Jake. "You've got to wake up!"

After a time Jake opened his eyes and blinked at Bethune. "All right! You're not as fat as Salvador, and you can catch that chair. The fool thing follows me and keeps getting in my way."

"Come out," Bethune ordered him, and turned to the negro. "Where's his pyjamas?"

Salvador brought a suit, and Dick, who dragged Jake out of bed, asked: "How did you get into this mess?"

"Fell into pond behind the dam; not safe that pond. Put a shingle up to-morrow, 'Keep off the grass.' No, that'sh not right. Let'sh try again. 'Twenty dollars fine if you spit on the sidewalk.'"

Bethune grinned at Dick. "It's not an unusual notice in some of our smaller towns, and one must admit it's necessary. However, we want to get him into dry clothes."

Jake gave them some trouble, but they put him in a re-made bed and went back to the verandah, where Bethune sat down.

"Fuller has his good points, but I guess you find him something of a responsibility," he remarked.

"I do," said Dick, with feeling. "Still, this is the first time he has come home the worse for liquor. I'm rather worried about it, because it's a new trouble."

"And you had enough already?" Bethune suggested. "Well, though you're not very old yet, I think Miss Fuller did well to make you his guardian, and perhaps I'm to blame for his relapse, because I sent him to Santa Brigida. François was busy and there were a number of bills to pay for stores we bought in the town. I hope Fuller hasn't lost the money!"

Dick felt disturbed, but he said, "I don't think so. Jake's erratic, but he's surprised me by his prudence now and then."

Bethune left soon afterwards, and Dick went to bed, but got up again after an hour or two and began his work without seeing Jake. They did not meet during the day, and Dick went home to his evening meal uncertain what line to take. He had no real authority, and finding Jake languid and silent, decided to say nothing about his escapade. When the meal was finished, they left the hot room, as usual, for the veranda, and Jake dropped listlessly into a canvas chair.

"I allow you're more tactful than I thought," he remarked with a feeble smile. "Guess I was pretty drunk last night."

"It looked rather like it from your clothes and the upset in the house," Dick agreed.

Jake looked thoughtful. "Well," he said ingenuously, "I *have* been on a jag before, but I really don't often indulge in that kind of thing, and don't remember drinking enough to knock me out. You see, Kenwardine's a fastidious fellow and sticks to wine. The sort he keeps is light."

"Then you got drunk at his house? I'd sooner have heard you were at the casino, where the Spaniards would have turned you out."

"You don't know the worst yet," Jake replied hesitatingly. "As I'm in a very tight place, I'd better 'fess up. François doesn't seem to have told you that I tried to draw my pay for some months ahead."

"Ah!" said Dick, remembering with uneasiness what he had learned from Bethune. "That sounds ominous. Did you ——"

"Let me get it over," Jake interrupted. "Richter was there, besides a Spanish fellow, and a man called Black. We'd been playing cards, and I'd won a small pile when my luck began to turn. It wasn't long before I was cleaned out and heavily in debt. Kenwardine said I'd had enough and had better quit. I sometimes think you don't quite do the fellow justice."

"Never mind that," said Dick. "I suppose you didn't stop?"

"No; I took a drink that braced me up and soon afterwards thought I saw my chance. The cards

looked pretty good, and I put up a big bluff and piled on all I had."

"But you had nothing; you'd lost what you began with."

Jake colored. "Bethune had given me a check to bearer."

"I was afraid of that," Dick said gravely. "But go on."

"I thought I'd bluff them, but Black and the Spaniard told me to play, though Kenwardine held back at first. Said they didn't want to take advantage of my rashness and I couldn't make good. Well, I saw how I could put it over, and it looked as if they couldn't stop me, until Black brought out a trump I didn't think he ought to have. After that I don't remember much, but imagine I turned on the fellow and made some trouble."

"Can you remember how the cards went?"

"No," said Dick awkwardly, "not now, and I may have been mistaken about the thing. I believe I fell over the table and they put me on a couch. After a time, I saw there was nobody in the room, and thought I'd better get out." He paused and added with a flush: "I was afraid Miss Kenwardine might find me in the morning."

"You can't pay back the money you lost?"

"I can't. The check will show in the works' accounts and there'll sure be trouble if the old man hears of it."

Dick was silent for a few moments. It was curious that Jake had tried to defend Kenwardine; but this did not matter. The lad's anxiety and distress were plain.

"If you'll leave the thing entirely in my hands, I'll see what can be done," he said. "I'll have to tell Bethune."

"I'll do whatever you want, if you'll help me out," Jake answered eagerly, and after asking some questions about his losses, Dick went to Bethune's shack.

Bethune listened thoughtfully to what he had to say, and then remarked: "We'll take it for granted that you mean to see him through. Have you enough money?"

"No; that's why I came."

"You must get the check back, anyhow," said Bethune, who opened a drawer and took out a roll of paper currency. "Here's my pile, and it's at your service, but it won't go far enough."

"I think it will, with what I can add," said Dick, after counting the bills. "You see, I don't mean to pay the full amount."

Bethune looked at him and smiled.. "Well, that's rather unusual, but if they made him drunk and the game was not quite straight! Have you got his promise not to play again?"

"I haven't. What I'm going to do will make it awkward, if not impossible. Besides, he'll have no money. I'll stop what he owes out of his pay."

"A good plan! However, I won't lend you the money; I'll lend it Jake, which makes him responsible. But your pay's less than mine, and you'll have to economize for the next few months."

"That won't matter," Dick answered quietly. "I owe Fuller something, and I like the lad."

He went back to his shack and said to Jake, "We'll be able to clear off the debt, but you must ask no ques-

tions and agree to any arrangement I think it best to make."

"You're a good sort," Jake said with feeling; but Dick cut short his thanks and went off to bed.

Next morning he started for Santa Brigida, and when he reached Kenwardine's house met Clare on a balcony at the top of the outside stairs. Somewhat to his surprise, she stopped him with a sign, and then stood silent for a moment, looking disturbed.

"Mr. Brandon," she said hesitatingly, "I resented your trying to prevent Mr. Fuller coming here, but I now think it better that he should keep away. He's young and extravagant, and perhaps ——"

"Yes," said Dick, who felt sympathetic, knowing what her admission must have cost. "I'm afraid he's also rather unsteady."

Clare looked at him with some color in her face. "I must be frank. Something happened recently that showed me he oughtn't to come. I don't think I realized this before."

"Then you know what happened?"

"Not altogether," Clare replied. "But I learned enough to alarm and surprise me. You must understand that I didn't suspect ——" She paused with signs of confusion and then resumed: "Of course, people of different kinds visit my father on business, and sometimes stay an hour or two afterwards, and he really can't be held responsible for them. The customs of the country force him to be friendly; you know in Santa Brigida one's office is something like an English club. Well, a man who doesn't come often began a game of cards and when Mr. Fuller ——"

"Just so," said Dick as quietly as he could. "Jake's

rash and not to be trusted when there are cards about; indeed, I expect he's a good deal to blame, but I'm now going to ask your father not to encourage his visits. I've no doubt he'll see the reason for this."

"I'm sure he'll help you when he understands," Clare replied, and after giving Dick a grateful look moved away.

Dick went along the balcony, thinking hard. It was obvious that Clare had found the interview painful, though he had tried to make it easier for her. She had been alarmed, but he wondered whether she had given him the warning out of tenderness for Jake. It was probable that she really thought Kenwardine was not to blame, but it must have been hard to acknowledge that his house was a dangerous place for an extravagant lad. Still, a girl might venture much when fighting for her lover. Dick frowned as he admitted this. Jake was a good fellow in spite of certain faults, but it was disturbing to think that Clare might be in love with him.

It was something of a relief when Kenwardine met him at the door of his room and took him in. Dick felt that tact was not so needful now, because the hospitality shown him was counterbalanced by the theft of the plans, and he held Kenwardine, not Clare, accountable for this. Kenwardine indicated a chair, and then sat down.

"As you haven't been here since you got better, I imagine there's some particular reason for this call," he said, with a smile.

"That is so," Dick agreed. "I've come on Fuller's

behalf. He gave you a check the other night. Have you cashed it yet?"

"No. I imagined he might want to redeem it."

"He does; but, to begin with, I'd like to know how much he lost before he staked the check. I understand he increased the original stakes during the game."

"I dare say I could tell you, but I don't see your object."

"I'll explain it soon. We can't get on until I know the sum."

Kenwardine took a small, card-scoring book from a drawer, and after a few moments stated the amount Jake had lost.

"Thank you," said Dick. "I'll pay you the money now in exchange for the check."

"But he lost the check as well."

Dick hesitated. He had a repugnant part to play, since he must accuse the man who had taken him into his house when he was wounded of conspiring to rob a drunken lad. For all that, his benefactor's son should not be ruined, and he meant to separate him from Kenwardine.

"I think not," he answered coolly. "But suppose we let that go? The check is worthless, because payment can be stopped, but I'm willing to give you what Fuller had already lost."

Kenwardine raised his eyebrows in ironical surprise. "This is a somewhat extraordinary course. Is Mr. Fuller in the habit of disowning his debts? You know the rule about a loss at cards."

"Fuller has left the thing in my hands, and you

must hold me responsible. I mean to stick to the line I've taken."

"Then perhaps you won't mind explaining on what grounds you take it."

"Since you insist! Fuller was drunk when he made the bet. As you were his host, it was your duty to stop the game."

"The exact point when an excited young man ceases to be sober is remarkably hard to fix," Kenwardine answered dryly. "It would be awkward for the host if he fixed it too soon, and insulting to the guest."

"That's a risk you should have taken. For another thing, Fuller states that a trump was played by a man who ought not to have had it."

Kenwardine smiled. "Doesn't it strike you that you're urging conflicting reasons? First you declare that Fuller was drunk, and then that he was able to detect clever players at cheating. Your argument contradicts itself and is plainly absurd."

"Anyhow, I mean to urge it," Dick said doggedly.

"Well," said Kenwardine with a steady look, "I've no doubt you see what this implies. You charge me with a plot to intoxicate your friend and take a mean advantage of his condition."

"No; I don't go so far. I think you should have stopped the game, but Fuller accuses a man called Black of playing the wrong card. In fact, I admit that you don't mean to harm him, by taking it for granted that you'll let me have the check, because if you kept it, you'd have some hold on him."

"A firm hold," Kenwardine remarked.

Dick had partly expected this, and had his answer ready. "Not so firm as you think. If there was no

other way, it would force me to stop payment and inform my employer. It would be much better that Jake should have to deal with his father than with your friends."

"You seem to have thought over the matter carefully," Kenwardine rejoined. "Well, personally, I'm willing to accept your offer and give up the check; but I must consult the others, since their loss is as much as mine. Will you wait while I go to the telephone?"

Dick waited for some time, after which Kenwardine came back and gave him the check. As soon as he got it Dick left the house, satisfied because he had done what he had meant to do, and yet feeling doubtful. Kenwardine had given way too easily. It looked as if he was not convinced that he must leave Fuller alone.

On reaching the dam Dick gave Jake the check and told him how he had got it. The lad flushed angrily, but was silent for a moment, and then gave Dick a curious look.

"I can't deny your generosity, and I'll pay you back; but you see the kind of fellow you make me out."

"I told Kenwardine you left me to deal with the matter, and the plan was mine," said Dick.

Jake signified by a gesture that the subject must be dropped. "As I did agree to leave it to you, I can't object. After all, I expect you meant well."

CHAPTER XVII

THE BLACK-FUNNEL BOAT

THE breeze had fallen and the shining sea was smooth as glass when the launch passed Adexe. Dick, who lounged at the helm, was not going there. Some alterations to a mole along the coast had just been finished, and Stuyvesant had sent him to engage the contractor who had done the concrete work. Jake, who occasionally found his duties irksome, had insisted on coming.

As they crossed the mouth of the inlet, Dick glanced shorewards through his glasses. The white-washed coal-sheds glistened dazzlingly, and a fringe of snowy surf marked the curve of beach, but outside this a belt of cool, blue water extended to the wharf. The swell surged to and fro among the piles, checkered with purple shadows and laced with threads of foam, but it was the signs of human activity that occupied Dick's attention. He noticed the cloud of dust that rolled about the mounds of coal upon the wharf and blurred the figures of the toiling peons, and the way the tubs swung up and down from the hatches of an American collier until the rattle of her winches suddenly broke off.

"They seem to be doing a big business," he remarked. "It looks as if that boat had stopped discharging, but she must have landed a large quantity of coal."

"There's pretty good shelter at Adexe," Jake replied. "In ordinary weather, steamers can come up to the wharf, instead of lying a quarter of a mile off, as they do at Santa Brigida. However, there's not much cargo shipped, and a captain who wanted his bunkers filled would have to make a special call with little chance of picking up any freight. That must tell against the place."

They were not steaming fast, and just before a projecting point shut in the inlet the deep blast of a whistle rang across the water and the collier's dark hull swung out from the wharf. A streak of foam, cut sharply between her black side and the shadowed blue of the sea, marked her load-line, and she floated high, but not as if she were empty.

"Going on somewhere else to finish, I guess," said Jake. "How much do you reckon she has discharged?"

"Fifteen hundred tons, if she was full when she came in, and I imagine they hadn't much room in the sheds before. I wonder where Kenwardine gets the money, unless his friend, Richter, is rich."

"Richter has nothing to do with the business," Jake replied. "He was to have had a share, but they couldn't come to a satisfactory agreement."

Dick looked at him sharply. "How do you know?"

"I really don't know much. Kenwardine said something about it one night when I was at his house."

"Did somebody ask him?"

"No," said Jake, "I don't think so. The subject, so to speak, cropped up and he offered us the information."

Then he talked of something else and soon afterwards the coast receded as they crossed a wide bay. It was about four o'clock in the afternoon when they reached the farthest point from land. There was no wind, and in the foreground the sea ran in long undulations whose backs blazed with light. Farther off, the gentle swell was smoothed out and became an oily expanse that faded into the glitter on the horizon, but at one point the latter was faintly blurred. A passing vessel, Dick thought, and occupied himself with the engine, for he had not brought the fireman. Looking round some time afterwards, he saw that the ship had got more distinct and picked up his glasses.

She was a two-masted steamer and, cut off by the play of reflected light, floated like a mirage between sky and sea. After studying her for a minute, Dick gave Jake the glasses.

"It's a curious effect, but not uncommon on a day like this," he said. "She's like the big Spanish boats and has their tall black funnel."

"She's very like them," Jake agreed. "There's no smoke, and no wash about her. It looks as if they'd had some trouble in the engine-room and she'd stopped."

Dick nodded and glanced across the dazzling water towards the high, blue coast. He did not think the steamer could be seen from the land, and the launch would, no doubt, be invisible from her deck, but this was not important and he began to calculate how long it would take them to reach a point ahead. Some time later, he looked round again. The steamer was fading in the distance, but no smoke trailed behind

her and he did not think she had started yet. His attention, however, was occupied by the headland he was steering for, because he thought it marked the neighborhood of their port.

He spent an hour in the place before he finished his business and started home, and when they were about half-way across the bay the light began to fade. The sun had sunk and the high land cut, harshly blue, against a saffron glow; the sea was shadowy and colorless in the east. Presently Jake, who sat facing aft, called out:

"There's a steamer's masthead light coming up astern of us. Now I see her side lights, and by the distance between them she's a big boat."

Dick changed his course, because the steamer's three lights would not have been visible unless she was directly following him and the launch's small yellow funnel and dingy white topsides would be hard to distinguish. When he had shut out one of the colored side lights and knew he was safe, he stopped the engine to wait until the vessel passed. There was no reason why he should do so, but somehow he felt interested in the ship. Lighting his pipe, he studied her through the glasses, which he gave to Jake.

"She's the boat we saw before," he said.

"That's so," Jake agreed. "Her engines are all right now because she's steaming fast."

Dick nodded, for he had marked the mass of foam that curled and broke away beneath the vessel's bow, but Jake resumed: "It looks as if her dynamo had stopped. There's nothing to be seen but her navigation lights and she's certainly a passenger boat. They generally glitter like a gin-saloon."

The ship was getting close now and Dick, who asked for the glasses, examined her carefully as she came up, foreshortened, on their quarter. Her dark bow looked very tall and her funnel loomed, huge and shadowy, against the sky. Above its top the masthead light shed a yellow glimmer, and far below, the sea leapt and frothed about the line of hull. This drew out and lengthened as she came abreast of them, but now he could see the tiers of passenger decks, one above the other, there was something mysterious in the gloom that reigned on board. No ring of light pierced her long dark side and the gangways behind the rails and rows of stanchions looked like shadowy caves. In the open spaces, forward and aft, however, bodies of men were gathered, their clothes showing faintly white, but they stood still in a compact mass until a whistle blew and the indistinct figures scattered across the deck.

"A big crew," Jake remarked. "Guess they've been putting them through a boat or fire drill."

Dick did not answer, but when the vessel faded into a hazy mass ahead he started the engine and steered into her eddying wake, which ran far back into the dark. Then after a glance at the compass, he beckoned Jake. "Look how she's heading."

Jake told him and he nodded. "I made it half a point more to port, but this compass swivels rather wildly. Where do you think she's bound?"

"To Santa Brigida; but, as you can see, not direct. I expect her skipper wants to take a bearing from the Adexe lights. You are going there and her course is the same as ours."

"No," said Dick; "I'm edging in towards the land

rather short of Adexe. As we have the current on our bow, I want to get hold of the beach as soon as I can, for the sake of slacker water. Anyway, a big boat would keep well clear of the shore until she passed the Tajada reef."

"Then she may be going into Adexe for coal."

"That vessel wouldn't float alongside the wharf, and her skipper would sooner fill his bunkers where he'd get passengers and freight."

"Well, I expect we'll find her at Santa Brigida when we arrive."

They looked round, but the sea was now dark and empty and they let the matter drop. When they crossed the Adexe bight no steamer was anchored near, but a cluster of lights on the dusky beach marked the coaling wharf.

"They're working late," Dick said. "Can you see the tug?"

"You'd have to run close in before you could do so," Jake replied. "I expect they're trimming the coal the collier landed into the sheds."

"It's possible," Dick agreed, and after hesitating for a few moments held on his course. He remembered that one can hear a launch's engines and the splash of torn-up water for some distance on a calm night.

After a time, the lights of Santa Brigida twinkled ahead, and when they steamed up to the harbor both looked about. The American collier and a big cargo-boat lay with the reflections of their anchor-lights quivering on the swell, but there was no passenger liner to be seen. A man came to moor the launch

when they landed, and Jake asked if the vessel he described had called.

"No, señor," said the man. "The only boats I know like that are the Cadiz liners, and the next is not due for a fortnight."

"Her model's a pretty common one for big passenger craft," Jake remarked to Dick as they went up the mole. "Still, the thing's curious. She wasn't at Adexe and she hasn't been here. She certainly passed us, steering for the land, and I don't see where she could have gone."

Dick began to talk about something else, but next morning asked Stuyvesant for a day's leave. Stuyvesant granted it and Dick resumed: "Do you mind giving me a blank order form? I'm going to Adexe, and the storekeeper wants a few things we can't get in Santa Brigida."

Stuyvesant signed the form. "There it is. The new coaling people seem an enterprising crowd, and you can order anything they can supply."

Dick hired a mule and took the steep inland road; but on reaching Adexe went first to the sugar mill and spent an hour with the American engineer, whose acquaintance he had made. Then, having, as he thought, accounted for his visit, he went to the wharf and carefully looked about as he made his way to the manager's office.

A few grimy peons were brushing coal-dust off the planks, their thinly-clad forms silhouetted against the shining sea. Their movements were languid, and Dick wondered whether this was due to the heat or if it was accounted for by forced activity on the previous

night. A neatly built stack of coal stood beside the whitewashed sheds, but nothing suggested that it had been recently broken into. Passing it carelessly Dick glanced into the nearest shed, which was almost full, though its proximity to deep water indicated that supplies would be drawn from it before the other. Feeling rather puzzled, he stopped in front of the next shed and noted that there was much less coal in this. Moreover, a large number of empty bags lay near the entrance, as if they had been used recently and the storekeeper had not had time to put them away.

Two men were folding up the bags, but, by contrast with the glitter outside, the shed was dark, and Dick's eyes were not accustomed to the gloom. Still he thought one of the men was Oliva, the contractor whom Stuyvesant had dismissed. Next moment the fellow turned and threw a folded bag aside, after which he walked towards the other end of the shed. His movements were leisurely, but he kept his back to Dick and the latter thought this significant, although he was not sure the man had seen him.

As he did not want to be seen loitering about the sheds, he walked on, feeling puzzled. Since he did not know what stock the company had held, it was difficult to tell if coal had recently been shipped, but he imagined that some must have left the wharf after the collier had unloaded. He was used to calculating weights and cubic quantities, and the sheds were not large. Taking it for granted that the vessel had landed one thousand five hundred tons, he thought there ought to be more about than he could see. Still,

if some had been shipped, he could not understand why it had been taken, at a greater cost for labor, from the last shed, where one would expect the company to keep their reserve supply. He might, perhaps, find out something from the manager, but this would need tact.

Entering the small, hot office, he found a suave Spanish gentleman whom he had already met. The latter greeted him politely and gave him a cigar.

"It is not often you leave the works, but a change is good," he said.

"We're not quite so busy and I promised to pay Allen at the sugar mill a visit," Dick replied. "Besides, I had an excuse for the trip. We're short of some engine stores that I dare say you can let us have."

He gave the manager a list, and the Spaniard nodded as he marked the items.

"We can send you most of the things. It pays us to stock goods that the engineers of the ships we coal often want; but there are some we have not got."

"Very well," said Dick. "I'll fill up our form for what you have and you can put the things on board the tug the first time she goes to Santa Brigida."

"She will go in three or four days."

Dick decided that as the launch had probably been seen, he had better mention his voyage.

"That will be soon enough. If our storekeeper had told me earlier, I would have called here yesterday. I passed close by on my way to Orava."

"One of the peons saw your boat. It is some distance to Orava."

"The sea was very smooth," said Dick. "I went to engage a contractor who had been at work upon the mole."

So far, conversation had been easy, and he had satisfactorily accounted for his passing the wharf, without, he hoped, appearing anxious to do so; but he had learned nothing yet, although he thought the Spaniard was more interested in his doings than he looked.

"The collier was leaving as we went by," he resumed. "Trade must be good, because she seemed to have unloaded a large quantity of coal."

"Sixteen hundred tons," said the manager. "In war time, when freights advance, it is wise to keep a good stock."

As this was very nearly the quantity Dick had guessed, he noted the man's frankness, but somehow imagined it was meant to hide something.

"So long as you can sell the stock," he agreed. "War, however, interferes with trade, and the French line have reduced their sailings, while I expect the small British tramps won't be so numerous."

"They have nothing to fear in these waters."

"I suppose they haven't, and vessels belonging to neutral countries ought to be safe," said Dick. "Still, the Spanish company seem to have changed their sailings, because I thought I saw one of their boats yesterday; but she was a long way off on the horizon."

He thought the other gave him a keen glance, but as the shutters were partly closed the light was not good, and the man answered carelessly:

"They do not deal with us. Adexe is off their course and no boats so large can come up to the wharf."

"Well," said Dick, who believed he had admitted enough to disarm any suspicion the other might have entertained, "doesn't coal that's kept exposed to the air lose some of its heating properties?"

"It does not suffer much damage. But we will drink a glass of wine, and then I will show you how we keep our coal."

"Thanks. These things interest me, but I looked into the sheds as I passed," Dick answered as he drank his wine.

They went out and when they entered the first shed the Spaniard called a peon and gave him an order Dick did not catch. Then he showed Dick the cranes, and the trucks that ran along the wharf on rails, and how they weighed the bags of coal. After a time they went into a shed that was nearly empty and Dick carefully looked about. Several peons were at work upon the bags, but Oliva was not there. Dick wondered whether he had been warned to keep out of sight.

As they went back to the office, his companion looked over the edge of the wharf and spoke to a seaman on the tug below. Her fires were out and the hammering that came up through the open skylights indicated that work was being done in her engine-room. Then one of the workmen seemed to object to something another said, for Dick heard "No; it must be tightened. It knocked last night."

He knew enough Castilian to feel sure he had not been mistaken, and the meaning of what he had heard was plain. A shaft-journal knocks when the bearings it revolves in have worn or shaken loose, and the machinery must have been running when the engineer

heard the noise. Dick thought it better to light a cigarette, and was occupied shielding the match with his hands when the manager turned round. A few minutes later he stated that as it was a long way to Santa Brigida he must start soon and after some Spanish compliments the other let him go.

He followed the hill road slowly in a thoughtful mood. The manager had been frank, but Dick suspected him of trying to show that he had nothing to hide. Then he imagined that a quantity of coal had been shipped since the previous day, and if the tug had been at sea at night, she must have been used for towing lighters. The large vessel he had seen was obviously a passenger boat, but fast liners could be converted into auxiliary cruisers. There were, however, so far as he knew, no enemy cruisers in the neighborhood; indeed, it was supposed that they had been chased off the seas. Still, there was something mysterious about the matter, and he meant to watch the coaling company and Kenwardine.

CHAPTER XVIII

DICK GETS A WARNING

ON the evening of one pay-day, Dick took a short cut through the half-breed quarter of Santa Brigida. As not infrequently happens in old Spanish cities, this unsavory neighborhood surrounded the cathedral and corresponded in character with the localities known in western America as "across the track." Indeed, a Castilian proverb bluntly plays upon the juxtaposition of vice and bells.

Ancient houses rose above the dark and narrow street. Flakes of plaster had fallen from their blank walls, the archways that pierced them were foul and strewn with refuse, and a sour smell of decay and garbage tainted the stagnant air. Here and there a grossly fat, slatternly woman leaned upon the rails of an outside balcony; negroes, Chinamen, and half-breeds passed along the broken pavements; and the dirty, open-fronted wine-shops, where swarms of flies hovered about the tables, were filled with loungers of different shades of color.

By and by Dick noticed a man in clean white duck on the opposite side of the street. He was a short distance in front, but his carriage and the fit of his clothes indicated that he was a white man and probably an American, and Dick slackened his pace. He

imagined that the other would sooner not be found in that neighborhood if he happened to be an acquaintance. The fellow, however, presently crossed the street, and when he stopped and looked about, Dick, meeting him face to face, saw with some surprise that it was Kemp, the fireman, who had shown him an opportunity of escaping from the steamer that took them South.

Kemp had turned out a steady, sober man, and Dick, who had got him promoted, wondered what he was doing there, though he reflected that his own presence in the disreputable locality was liable to be misunderstood. Kemp, however, looked at him with a twinkle.

"I guess you're making for the harbor, Mr. Brandon?"

Dick said he was, and Kemp studied the surrounding houses.

"Well," he resumed, "I'm certainly up against it now. I don't know much Spanish, and these fool dagos can't talk American, while they're packed so tight in their blamed tenements that it's curious they don't fall out of the windows. It's a tough proposition to locate a man here."

"Then you're looking for somebody?"

"Yes. I've tracked Payne to this *calle,* but I guess there's some trailing down to be done yet."

"Ah!" said Dick; for Payne was the dismissed storekeeper. "Why do you want him?"

"I met him a while back and he'd struck bad luck, hurt his arm, for one thing. He'd been working among the breeds on the mole and living in their tenements, and couldn't strike another job. I reckoned

he might want a few dollars, and I don't spend all my pay."

Dick nodded, because he understood the unfortunate position of the white man who loses caste in a tropical country. An Englishman or American may engage in manual labor where skill is required and the pay is high, but he must live up to the standards of his countrymen. If forced to work with natives and adopt their mode of life, he risks being distrusted and avoided by men of his color. Remembering that Payne had interfered when he was stabbed, Dick had made some inquiries about him, but getting no information decided that he had left the town.

"Then he's lodging in this street," he said.

"That's what they told me at the wine-shop. He had to quit the last place because he couldn't pay."

"Wasn't he with Oliva?" Dick inquired.

"He was, but Oliva turned him down. I allow it was all right to fire him, but he's surely up against it now."

Dick put his hand in his pocket. "If you find him, you might let me know. In the meantime, here's five dollars ——"

"Hold on!" said Kemp. "Don't take out your wallet here. I'll fix the thing, and ask for the money when I get back."

Dick left him, and when he had transacted his business returned to the dam. An hour or two later Kemp arrived and stated that he had not succeeded in finding Payne. The man had left the squalid room he occupied and nobody knew where he had gone.

During the next week Dick had again occasion to visit the harbor, and while he waited on the mole for

a boat watched a gang of peons unloading some fertilizer from a barge. It was hard and unpleasant work, for the stuff, which had a rank smell, escaped from the bags and covered the perspiring men. The dust stuck to their hot faces, almost hiding their color; but one, though equally dirty, looked different from the rest, and Dick, noting that he only used his left arm, drew nearer. As he did so, the man walked up the steep plank from the lighter with a bag upon his back and staggering across the mole dropped it with a gasp. His heaving chest and set face showed what the effort had cost, and the smell of the fertilizer hung about his ragged clothes. Dick saw that it was Payne and that the fellow knew him.

"You have got a rough job," he remarked. "Can't you find something better?"

"Nope," said the man grimly. "Do you reckon I'd pack dirt with a crowd like this if I could help it?"

Dick, who glanced at the lighter, where half-naked negroes and mulattos were at work amid a cloud of nauseating dust, understood the social degradation the other felt.

"What's the matter with your arm?" he asked.

Payne pulled up his torn sleeve and showed an inflamed and half-healed wound.

"That! Got it nipped in a crane-wheel and it doesn't get much better. Guess this dirt is poisonous. Anyway, it keeps me here. I've been trying to make enough to buy a ticket to Jamaica, but can't work steady. As soon as I've put up two or three dollars, I have to quit."

Dick could understand this. The man looked gaunt

and ill and must have been heavily handicapped by his injured arm. He did not seem anxious to excite Dick's pity, though the latter did not think he cherished much resentment.

"I tried to find you when I got better after being stabbed," he said. "I don't quite see why you came to my help."

Payne grinned sourly. "You certainly hadn't much of a claim; but you were a white man and that dago meant to kill. Now if I'd held my job with Fuller and you hadn't dropped on to Oliva's game, I'd have made my little pile; but I allow you had to fire us when something put you wise."

"I see," said Dick, with a smile at the fellow's candor. "Well, I couldn't trust you with the cement again, but we're short of a man to superintend a peon gang and I'll talk to Mr. Stuyvesant about it if you'll tell me your address."

Payne gave him a fixed, eager look. "You get me the job and take me out of this and you won't be sorry. I'll make it good to you — and I reckon I can."

Dick, who thought the other's anxiety to escape from his degrading occupation had prompted his last statement, turned away, saying he would see what could be done, and in the evening visited Stuyvesant. Bethune was already with him, and Dick told them how he had found Payne.

"You felt you had to promise the fellow a job because he butted in when the dagos got after you?" Stuyvesant suggested.

"No," said Dick with some embarrassment, "it wasn't altogether that. He certainly did help me, but I can't pass my obligations on to my employer. If

you think he can't be trusted, I'll pay his passage to another port."

"Well, I don't know that if I had the option I'd take the fellow out of jail, so long as he was shut up decently out of sight; but this is worse, in a way. What do you think, Bethune?"

Bethune smiled. "You ought to know. I'm a bit of a philosopher, but when you stir my racial feelings I'm an American first. The mean white's a troublesome proposition at home, but we can't afford to exhibit him to the dagos here." He turned to Dick. "That's our attitude, Brandon, and though you were not long in our country, you seem to sympathize with it. I don't claim it's quite logical, but there it is! We're white and *different*."

"Do you want me to hire the man?" Stuyvesant asked with an impatient gesture.

"Yes," said Dick.

"Then put him on. If he steals anything, I'll hold you responsible and ship him out on the next cement boat, whether he wants to go or not."

Next morning Dick sent word to Payne, who arrived at the dam soon afterwards and did his work satisfactorily. On the evening of the first pay-day he went to Santa Brigida, but Dick, who watched him in the morning, noted somewhat to his surprise, that he showed no signs of dissipation. When work stopped at noon he heard a few pistol shots, but was told on inquiring that it was only one or two of the men shooting at a mark. A few days afterwards he found it necessary to visit Santa Brigida. Since Bethune confined his talents to constructional problems and languidly protested that he had no aptitude for

commerce, much of the company's minor business gradually fell into Dick's hands. As a rule, he went to the town in the evening, after he had finished at the dam. While a hand-car was being got ready to take him down the line, Payne came up to the veranda, where Dick sat with Jake.

"You're going down town, Mr. Brandon," he said. "Have you got a gun?"

"I have not," said Dick.

Payne pulled out an automatic pistol. "Then you'd better take mine. I bought her, second-hand, with my first pay, but she's pretty good. I reckon you can shoot?"

"A little," said Dick, who had practised with the British army revolver. "Still I don't carry a pistol."

"You ought," Payne answered meaningly, and walking to the other end of the veranda stuck a scrap of white paper on a post. "Say, suppose you try her? I want to see you put a pill through that."

Dick was surprised by the fellow's persistence, but there is a fascination in shooting at a target, and when Jake urged him he took the pistol. Steadying it with stiffened wrist and forearm, he fired but hit the post a foot below the paper.

"You haven't allowed for the pull-off, and you're slow," Payne remarked. "You want to sight high, with a squeeze on the trigger, and then catch her on the drop."

He took the pistol and fixed his eyes on the paper before he moved. Then his arm went up suddenly and the glistening barrel pointed above the mark. There was a flash as his wrist dropped and a black spot appeared near the middle of the paper.

"Use her like that! You'd want a mighty steady hand to hold her dead on the mark while you pull off."

"Sit down and tell us why you think Mr. Brandon ought to have the pistol," Jake remarked. "I go to Santa Brigida now and then, but you haven't offered to lend it me."

Payne sat down on the steps and looked at him with a smile. "You're all right, Mr. Fuller. They're not after you."

"Then you reckon it wasn't me they wanted the night my partner was stabbed? I had the money."

"Nope," said Payne firmly. "I allow they'd have corralled the dollars if they could, but it was Mr. Brandon they meant to knock out." He paused and added in a significant tone: "They're after him yet."

"Hadn't you better tell us whom you mean by 'they'?" Dick asked.

"Oliva's gang. There are toughs in the city who'd kill you for fifty cents."

"Does that account for your buying the pistol when you came here?"

"It does," Payne admitted dryly. "I didn't mean to take any chances when it looked as if I was going back on my dago partner."

"He turned you down first, and I don't see how you could harm him by working for us."

Payne did not answer, and Dick, who thought he was pondering something, resumed: "These half-breeds are a revengeful lot, but after all, Oliva wouldn't run a serious risk without a stronger motive than he seems to have."

"Well," said Payne, "if I talked Spanish, I could

tell you more; but I was taking my siesta one day in a dark wine-shop when two or three hard-looking peons came in. They mayn't have seen me, because there were some casks in the way, and anyhow, they'd reckon I couldn't understand them. I didn't very well, but I heard your name and caught a word or two. Their *patron* had given them some orders and one called him Don Ramon. You were to be watched, because *mirar* came in; but I didn't get the rest and they went out soon. I lay as if I was asleep, but I'd know the crowd again." Payne got up as he concluded: "Anyway, you take my gun, and keep in the main *calles,* where the lights are."

When he had gone Jake remarked: "I guess his advice is good and I'm coming along."

"No," said Dick, smiling as he put the pistol in his pocket. "The trouble is that if I took you down there I mightn't get you back. Besides, there are some calculations I want you to make."

Lighting his pipe, he took his seat on the hand-car and knitted his brows as two colored laborers drove him down the hill. Below, the lights of Santa Brigida gleamed in a cluster against the dusky sea, and he knew something of the intrigues that went on in the town. Commercial and political jealousies were very keen, and citizens of all ranks fought and schemed against their neighbors. The place was rank with plots, but it was hard to see how he could be involved. Yet it certainly began to look as if he had been stabbed by Oliva's order, and Oliva was now employed at the Adexe coaling wharf.

This seemed to throw a light upon the matter. Something mysterious was going on at Adexe, and

perhaps he had been incautious and had shown his suspicions; the Spaniards were subtle. The manager might have imagined he knew more than he did; but if it was worth defending by the means Payne had hinted at, the secret must be very important, and the plotters would hesitate about betraying themselves by another attempt upon his life so long as there was any possibility of failure. Besides, it was dangerous to attack a foreigner, since if he were killed, the representative of his country would demand an exhaustive inquiry.

While Dick pondered the matter the hand-car stopped and he alighted and walked briskly to Santa Brigida, keeping in the middle of the road. When he reached the town, he chose the wide, well-lighted streets but saw nothing suspicious. After transacting his business he ventured, by way of experiment, across a small dark square and returned to the main street by a narrow lane, but although he kept a keen watch nothing indicated that he was followed. Reaching the hand-car without being molested, he determined to be cautious in future, though it was possible that Payne had been deceived.

CHAPTER XIX

JAKE EXPLAINS MATTERS

THE sun had sunk behind the range when Clare Kenwardine stood, musing, on a balcony of the house. Voices and footsteps reached her across the roofs, for Santa Brigida was wakening from its afternoon sleep and the traffic had begun again in the cooling streets. The girl listened vacantly, as she grappled with questions that had grown more troublesome of late.

The life she led often jarred, and yet she could find no escape. She hoped she was not unnecessarily censorious and tried to argue that after all there was no great harm in gambling, but rarely succeeded in convincing herself. Then she had deliberately thrown in her lot with her father's. When she first insisted on joining him in England, he had, for her sake, as she now realized, discouraged the plan, but had since come to depend upon her in many ways, and she could not leave him. Besides, it was too late. She had made her choice and must stick to it.

Yet she rebelled against the feeling that she had brought a taint or stigma upon herself. She had no women friends except the wives of one or two Spanish officials whose reputation for honesty was not of the best; the English and American women left her alone. Most of the men she met she frankly disliked, and im-

agined that the formal respect they showed her was due to her father's hints. Kenwardine's moral code was not severe, but he saw that his guests preserved their manners. Clare had heard the Spaniards call him *muy caballero,* and they knew the outward points of a gentleman. While she pondered, he came out on the balcony.

"Brooding?" he said with a smile. "Well, it has been very dull lately and we need cheering up. Suppose you send Mr. Fuller a note and ask him to dinner to-morrow? He's sometimes amusing and I think you like him."

Clare braced herself for a struggle, for it was seldom she refused her father's request.

"Yes," she said, "I like him, but it would be better if he didn't come."

Kenwardine gave her a keen glance, but although he felt some surprise did not try to hide his understanding of what she meant.

"It looks as if you knew something about what happened on his last visit."

"I do," Clare answered. "It was rather a shock."

"One mustn't exaggerate the importance of these things," Kenwardine remarked in an indulgent tone. "It's difficult to avoid getting a jar now and then, though I've tried to shield you as much as possible. Fuller's young and high-spirited, and you really mustn't judge his youthful extravagance too severely."

"But don't you see you are admitting that he shouldn't come?" Clare asked, with some color in her face. "He *is* young and inexperienced, and your friends are men of the world. What is safe for them may be dangerous for him."

Kenwardine pondered. Fuller was an attractive lad, and he would not have been displeased to think that Clare's wish to protect him might spring from sentimental tenderness. But if this were so, she would hardly have been so frank and have admitted that he was weak. Moreover, if she found his society congenial, she would not insist on keeping him away.

"You are afraid some of the others might take advantage of his rashness?" he suggested. "Can't you trust me to see this doesn't happen?"

"It did happen, not long ago. And you can't go very far; one can't be rude to one's guests."

"Well," said Kenwardine, smiling, "it's kind of you to make an excuse for me. On the whole, of course, I like you to be fastidious in your choice of friends, but one should temper severity with sense. I don't want you to get as exacting as Brandon, for example."

"I'm afraid he was right when he tried to keep Fuller away."

"Right in thinking my house was unsafe for the lad, and in warning him that you and I were unfit for him to associate with?"

Kenwardine studied the girl. She looked distressed, and he thought this significant, but after a moment or two she answered steadily:

"After all, Brandon had some grounds for thinking so. I would much sooner you didn't urge me to ask Jake Fuller."

"Very well," said Kenwardine. "I don't want you to do anything that's repugnant; but, of course, if he comes to see me, I can't send him off. It isn't a matter of much importance, anyhow."

He left her, but she was not deceived by his careless tone. She thought he meant to bring Fuller back and did not see how she could prevent this, although she had refused to help. Then she thought about the plans that Brandon had lost at their house in England. They had certainly been stolen, for she could not doubt what he had told her, but it was painful to admit that her father had taken them. She felt dejected and lonely, and while she struggled against the depression Lucille came to say that Jake was waiting below.

"Tell him I am not at home," Clare replied.

Lucille went away and Clare left the balcony, but a few minutes later, when she thought Jake had gone, she went down the stairs and met him coming up. He stopped with a twinkle of amusement.

"I sent word that I was not at home," she said haughtily.

"You did," Jake agreed in an apologetic tone. "It's your privilege, but although I felt rather hurt, I don't see why that should prevent my asking if your father was in."

Clare's indignation vanished. She liked Jake and was moved by his reproachful look. She determined to try an appeal.

"Mr. Fuller," she said, "I would sooner you didn't come to see us. It would be better, in several ways."

He gave her a curious, intent look, in which she read sympathy. "I can't pretend I don't understand, and you're very brave. Still, I'm not sure you're quite just, to me among others. I'm a bit of a fool, but I'm not so rash as some people think. Anyhow,

if I were, I'd still be safe enough in your house. Sorry, but I can't promise to stop away."

"It would really be much better," Clare insisted.

"Would it make things any easier for you?"

"No," said Clare. "In a sense, it could make no difference to me."

"Very well. I intend to call on your father now and then. Of course, you needn't see me unless you like, though since I am coming, your keeping out of the way wouldn't do much good."

Clare made a gesture of helpless protest. "Why won't you be warned? Can't you understand? Do you think it is easy for me to try——"

"I don't," said Jake. "I know it's very hard. I think you're mistaken about the necessity for interfering; that's all." Then he paused and resumed in a different tone: "You see, I imagine that you must feel lonely at times, and that you might need a friend. I dare say you'd find me better than none, and I'd like to know that I'll have an opportunity of being around if I'm wanted."

He gave her a quiet, respectful glance, and Clare knew she had never liked him so much. He looked trustworthy, and it was a relief to note that there was no hint of anything but sympathy in his eyes and voice. He asked nothing but permission to protect her if there was need. Moreover, since they had been forced to tread on dangerous ground, he had handled the situation with courage. She might require a friend, and his honest sympathy was refreshing by contrast with the attitude of her father's companions. Some were hard and cynical and some were dissipated, but all were stamped by a repugnant greediness.

They sought something: money, the gratification of base desires, success in dark intrigue. Jake with his chivalrous generosity stood far apart from them; but he must be saved from becoming like them.

"If I knew how I could keep you away, I would do so, but I can, at least, see you as seldom as possible," she said and left him.

Jake knitted his brows as he went on to Kenwardine's room. He understood Clare's motive, and admitted that she meant well, but he was not going to stop away because she thought this better for him. There was, however, another matter that demanded his attention and he felt awkward when Kenwardine opened the door.

"It's some time since you have been to see us," the latter remarked.

"It is," said Jake. "Perhaps you can understand that I felt rather shy about coming after the way my partner arranged the matter of the check."

"He arranged it to your advantage, and you ought to be satisfied. Mr. Brandon is obviously a business man."

Jack resented the polished sneer. "He's a very good sort and I'm grateful to him; but it doesn't follow that I adopt his point of view."

"You mean his views about the payment of one's debts?"

"Yes," said Jake. "I don't consider the debt wiped out; in fact, that's why I came. I want to make good, but it will take time. If you will ask your friends to wait ——"

Kenwardine looked at him with an ironical smile. "Isn't this a change of attitude? I understood you

claimed that you were under a disadvantage through being drunk and suspected that the game was not quite straight."

"I was drunk and still suspect Black of crooked play."

"It's rather a grave statement."

"I quite see that," said Jake. "However, I deserved to lose for being drunk when I was betting high, and don't hold you accountable for Black. You'd take steep chances if you guaranteed all guests."

Kenwardine laughed. "You're remarkably frank; but there's some truth in what you say, although the convention is that I do guarantee them and their honor's mine."

"We'll keep to business," Jake replied. "Will you tell your friends I'll pay them out in full as soon as I can?"

"Certainly. Since they thought the matter closed, it will be a pleasant surprise, but we'll let that go. Mr. Brandon obviously didn't consult your wishes, but have you any idea what his object was in taking his very unusual line?"

"Yes," said Jake; "if you press me, I have."

"He thought he would make it awkward for you to come here, in fact?"

"Something like that."

"Then you mean to run the risk?"

"I'm coming, if you'll allow it," Jake answered with a twinkle. "The risk isn't very great, because if I lose any more money in the next few months, the winners will not get paid. The old man certainly won't stand for it if I get into debt."

Kenwardine pushed a box of cigarettes across. "I

congratulate you on your way of making things clear, and now we understand each other you can come when you like. Have a smoke."

Jake took a cigarette, but left soon afterwards to do an errand of Bethune's that had given him an excuse for visiting the town. Then he went back to the dam, and after dinner sat outside Dick's shack, pondering what Clare had said. She had, of course, had some ground for warning him, but he did not believe yet that Kenwardine meant to exploit his recklessness. It would not be worth while, for one thing, since he had never had much money to lose and now had none. Besides, Kenwardine was not the man to take a mean advantage of his guest, though Jake could not say as much for some of his friends. Anyhow, he meant to go to the house because he felt that Clare might need his help. He did not see how that might be, but he had a half-formed suspicion that she might have to suffer on her father's account, and if anything of the kind happened, he meant to be about.

Yet he was not in love with her. She attracted him strongly, and he admitted that it would be remarkably easy to become infatuated, but did not mean to let this happen. Though often rash, he had more sense and self-control than his friends believed, and realized that Clare was not for him. He could not tell how he had arrived at this conclusion, but there it was, and he knew he was not mistaken. Sometimes he wondered with a twinge of jealousy what she thought of Brandon.

By and by he roused himself from his reflections and looked about. There was no moon and a thin mist that had stolen out of the jungle drifted past

the shack. A coffee-pot and two cups stood upon a table near his chair, and one cup was half empty, as Dick had left it when he was unexpectedly summoned to the dam, where work was going on. The veranda lamp had been put out, because Jake did not want to read and a bright light would have attracted moths and beetles, but Dick had left a lamp burning in his room, and a faint illumination came through the curtain on the open window. Everything was very quiet except when the ringing of hammers and the rattle of a crane rose from the dam.

Looking farther round, Jake thought he distinguished the blurred outline of a human figure in the mist, but was not surprised. Some ironwork that made a comfortable seat lay near the shack and the figure had been there before. For all that, he imagined the man was wasting his time and keeping an unnecessary watch. Then his thoughts again centered on Clare and Kenwardine and some time had passed when he looked up. Something had disturbed him, but he could not tell what it was, and on glancing at the spot where he had seen the figure he found it had gone.

Next moment a board in the house creaked softly, as if it had been trodden on; but the boards often did so after a change of temperature, and Jake sat still. Their colored servant had asked leave to go down to the camp and was perhaps now coming back. One had to be careful not to give one's imagination too much rein in these hot countries. Payne seemed to have done so and had got an attack of nerves, which was curious, because indulgence in native caña generally led to that kind of thing, and Payne was

sober. Moreover, he was of the type that is commonly called hard.

Jake took out a cigarette and was lighting it when he heard a swift, stealthy step close behind him. He dropped the match as he swung round, pushing back his canvas chair, and found his eyes dazzled by the sudden darkness. Still he thought he saw a shadow flit across the veranda and vanish into the mist. Next moment there were heavier footsteps, and a crash as a man fell over the projecting legs of the chair. The fellow rolled down the shallow stairs, dropping a pistol and then hurriedly got up.

"Stop right there, Pepe!" he shouted. "What were you doing in that room?"

Nobody answered and Jake turned to the man, who was rubbing his leg.

"What's the trouble, Payne?" he asked.

"He's lit out, but I reckon I'd have got him if you'd been more careful how you pushed your chair around."

"Whom did you expect to get?"

"Well," said Payne, "it wasn't Pepe."

"Then why did you call him?"

"I wanted the fellow I was after to think I'd made a mistake."

Jake could understand this, though the rest was dark. Pepe was an Indian boy who brought water and domestic stores to the shack, but would have no excuse for entering it at night.

"I allow he meant to dope the coffee," Payne resumed.

This was alarming, and Jake abruptly glanced at the table. The intruder must have been close to it and behind him when he heard the step, and might

have accomplished his purpose and stolen away had he not struck the match.

"He hadn't time," he answered. "We had better see what he was doing in the house."

Payne put away his pistol and they entered Dick's room. Nothing seemed to have been touched, until Jake placed the lamp on a writing-table where Dick sometimes worked at night. The drawers beneath it were locked, but Payne indicated a greasy finger-print on the writing-pad.

"I guess that's a dago's mark. Mr. Brandon would wash his hands before he began to write."

Jake agreed, and picking up the pad thought the top sheet had been hurriedly removed, because a torn fragment projected from the leather clip. The sheet left was covered with faint impressions, but it rather looked as if these had been made by the ink running through than by direct contact. Jake wrote a few words on a scrap of paper and pressing it on the pad noted the difference.

"This is strange," he said. "I don't get the drift of it."

Payne looked at him with a dry smile. "If you'll come out and let me talk, I'll try to put you wise."

Jake nodded and they went back to the veranda.

CHAPTER XX

DON SEBASTIAN

WHEN they returned to the veranda Payne sat down on the steps. Jake picked up his chair and looked at him thoughtfully.

"Now," he said, "I want to know why you have been prowling about the shack at night. You had better begin at the beginning."

"Very well. I guess you know I was put off this camp soon before you came?"

"I heard something about it," Jake admitted.

Payne grinned as if he appreciated his tact, and then resumed: "In the settlement where I was raised, the old fellow who kept the store had a cheat-ledger. When somebody traded stale eggs and garden-truck for good groceries, and the storekeeper saw he couldn't make trouble about it without losing a customer, he said nothing but scored it down against the man. Sometimes he had to wait a long while, but sooner or later he squared the account. Now that's my plan with Don Ramon Oliva."

"I see," said Jake. "What have you against him?"

"To begin with, he got me fired. It was a thing I took my chances of and wouldn't have blamed him for; but I reckon now your father's cement wasn't all he was after. He wanted a pull on me."

"Why?"

"I haven't got that quite clear, but I'm an American and could do things he couldn't, without being suspected."

"Go on," said Jake, in a thoughtful tone.

"Well, for a clever man, he made a very poor defense when your partner spotted his game; seemed to say if they reckoned he'd been stealing, he'd let it go at that. Then, when he'd got me and found I wasn't the man he wanted, he turned me down. Left me to live with breeds and niggers!"

"What do you mean by your not being the man he wanted?"

Payne smiled in a deprecatory way. "I allow that I was willing to make a few dollars on the cement, but working against white men in a dago plot is a different thing."

"Then there is a plot?"

"Well," said Payne quietly, "I don't know much about it, but something's going on."

Jake lighted a cigarette while he pondered. He was not surprised that Payne should talk to him with confidential familiarity, because the situation warranted it, and the American workman is not, as a rule, deferential to his employer. The fellow might be mistaken, but he believed that Oliva had schemed to get him into his power and work upon his wish for revenge. Jake could understand Oliva's error. Payne's moral code was rudimentary, but he had some racial pride and would not act like a treacherous renegade.

"I begin to see how your account against Oliva stands," he remarked. "But is that the only entry in your book?"

"I guess not," Payne replied. "Mr. Brandon's name is there, but the entry is against myself. It was a straight fight when he had me fired, and he took me back when he found I was down and out."

Jake nodded. "You have already warned Brandon that he might be in some danger in the town."

"That's so. Since then, I reckoned that they were getting after him *here,* but we were more likely to hold them up if they didn't know we knew. That's why I called out to show I thought it was Pepe who was in the shack."

"Very well," said Jake. "There's nothing more to be done in the meantime, but you'd better tell me if you find out anything else."

Payne went away and when Dick came in Jake took him into his room and indicated the blotter.

"Have you torn off the top sheet in the last few days?"

"I don't remember doing so, but now I come to look, it has been torn off."

"What have you been writing lately?"

"Orders for small supplies, specifications of material, and such things."

"Concrete, in short?" Jake remarked. "Well, it's not an interesting subject to outsiders and sometimes gets very stale to those who have to handle it. Are you quite sure you haven't been writing about anything else?"

"I am sure. Why do you ask?"

"Because, as you see, somebody thought it worth while to steal the top sheet of your blotter," Jake replied. "Now perhaps I'd better tell you something I've just learned."

He related what Payne had told him and concluded: "I'm puzzled about Oliva's motive. After all, it could hardly be revenge."

"No," said Dick, with a thoughtful frown, "I don't imagine it is."

"Then what does he expect to gain?"

Dick was silent for a few moments with knitted brows, and then asked: "You have a Monroe Doctrine, haven't you?"

"We certainly have," Jake agreed, smiling. "We reaffirmed it not long ago."

"Roughly speaking, the Doctrine states that no European power can be allowed to set up a naval base or make warlike preparations in any part of America. In fact, you warn all foreigners to keep their hands off?"

"That's its general purport; but while I support it patriotically, I can't tell you exactly what it says. Anyhow, I don't see what this has to do with the matter."

"Nor do I, but it seems to promise a clue," Dick answered dryly. He frowned at the blotter and then added: "We'll leave it at that. I've some vague suspicions, but nothing to act upon. If the thing gets any plainer, I'll let you know."

"But what about Payne? Is he to hang around here nights with his gun?"

"No," said Dick, "it isn't necessary. But there'd be no harm in our taking a few precautions."

He stretched his arms wearily when Jake left him, for he had had a tiring day and had now been given ground for anxious thought. He had not troubled much about Oliva while he imagined that the fellow

was actuated by a personal grudge, but his antagonism began to look more dangerous. Suppose the Adexe coaling station was intended to be something of the nature of a naval base? Munitions and other contraband of war might be quietly sent off with fuel to fighting ships. Richter, the German, had certainly been associated with Kenwardine, who had made an opportunity for telling Jake that they had disagreed. Then suppose the owners of the station had learned that they were being spied upon? Dick admitted that he might not have been as tactful as he thought; and he was employed by an influential American. The Americans might be disposed to insist upon a strict observance of the Monroe Doctrine. Granting all this, if he was to be dealt with, it would be safer to make use of a half-breed who was known to have some ground for hating him.

Dick, however, reflected that he was taking much for granted and his suppositions might well be wrong. It was unwise to attach too much importance to a plausible theory. Then he could not expose Kenwardine without involving Clare, and saw no means of separating them. Besides, Kenwardine's position was strong. The officials were given to graft, and he had, no doubt, made a skilful use of bribes. Warnings about him would not be listened to, particularly as he was carrying on a thriving business and paying large sums in wages in a country that depended on foreign capital.

Then Dick got up with a frown. His head ached and he was tired after working since sunrise in enervating heat. The puzzle could not be solved now, and he must wait until he found out something more.

For the next two or three evenings he was kept busy at the dam, where work was carried on after dark, and Jake, taking advantage of this, went to Santa Brigida one night when he knew the locomotive would be coming back up the line. Nothing of importance happened at Kenwardine's, where he did not see Clare, and on his return he took a short cut through a badly-lighted part of the town. There was perhaps some risk in this, but Jake seldom avoided an adventure. Nothing unusual happened as he made his way through the narrow streets, until he reached a corner where a noisy group hung about the end house. As the men did not look sober, he took the other side of the street, where the light of a lamp fell upon him.

His close-fitting white clothes distinguished him from the picturesque untidiness of the rest, and when somebody shouted, *"Un Gringo!"* one or two moved across as if to stop him. Jake walked on quickly, looking straight in front without seeming to notice the others, in the hope of getting past before they got in his way, but a man dressed like a respectable citizen came round the corner and the peons ran off. Since the appearance of a single stranger did not seem to account for this, Jake wondered what had alarmed them, until he saw a rural guard in white uniform behind the other. When the man came up the *rurale* stopped and raised his hand as if he meant to salute, but let it fall again, and Jake imagined that the first had given him a warning glance. He knew the thin, dark-faced Spaniard, whom he had met at Kenwardine's.

The man touched Jake's shoulder and drew him

away, and the lad thought it strange that the *rurale* went on without asking a question.

"I don't know that the peons meant to make trouble, but I'm glad you came along, Don Sebastian," he said.

"It is an honor to have been of some service, but it looks as if you were as rash in other matters as you are at cards," the Spaniard answered. "These dark *calles* are unsafe for foreigners."

"So it seems, but I'm afraid it will be a long time before I'm worth robbing," Jake replied, and then remembered with embarrassment that the other was one of the party whose winnings he had not yet paid.

Don Sebastian smiled, but said suavely: "For all that, you should not take an unnecessary risk. You have been attacked once already, I think?"

"Yes, but it was my partner who got hurt."

"That is one of the ironies of luck. Señor Brandon is sober and cautious, but he gets injured when he comes to protect you, who are rash."

"He's what you say, but I didn't know you had met him," Jake replied.

"I have heard of him; you foreigners are talked about in the cafés. They talk much in Santa Brigida; many have nothing else to do. But have you and Señor Brandon only been molested once?"

Jake hesitated for a moment. He liked the man and on the whole thought he could be trusted, while he imagined that he was not prompted by idle curiosity but knew something. Besides, Jake was often impulsive and ready, as he said, to back his judgment.

"We were only once actually attacked, but something rather curious happened not long ago."

"Ah!" said Don Sebastian, "this is interesting,

and as I know something of the intrigues that go on in the city it might be to your advantage to tell me about it. There is a quiet wine-shop not far off."

"Would it be safe to go in?" Jake asked.

"I think so," his companion answered, smiling.

Jake presently followed him into a small, dimly lighted room, and noted that the landlord came to wait on them with obsequious attention. Two peons were drinking in a corner, but they went out when the landlord made a sign. Jake thought this curious, but Don Sebastian filled his glass and gave him a cigarette.

"Now," he said, "we have the place to ourselves and you can tell your story."

Jake related how a stranger had stolen into their shack a few days ago, and Don Sebastian listened attentively.

"You do not think it was one of the peons employed at the dam?" he suggested.

"No," said Jake. "Anyhow, Payne seemed satisfied it wasn't."

"He would probably know them better than you. Do you keep money in the house?"

"Very little. We lock up the money for wages in the pay-office safe. Anyhow, I'm not sure the fellow came to steal."

"If he did so, one would not imagine that he would be satisfied with blotting-paper," Don Sebastian agreed. "You said there was some coffee on the table."

"There was. Payne reckoned the fellow meant to dope it. What do you think?"

"It is possible, if he had ground for being revengeful. Some of the Indians from the mountains are expert poisoners. But why should anybody wish to injure your comrade?"

"I didn't suggest that he wished to injure Brandon. He might have meant to dope me."

Don Sebastian smiled. "That is so, but on the whole I do not think it probable. Do you know of anybody whom your friend has harmed?"

Jake decided to tell him about Oliva. He was now convinced that Don Sebastian knew more than he admitted and that his interest was not unfriendly. Besides, there was somehow a hint of authority in the fellow's thin, dark face. He showed polite attention as Jake narrated the events that had led to Oliva's dismissal, but the lad imagined that he was telling him nothing he had not already heard.

"The motive may have been revenge, but as Señor Brandon was stabbed that ought to satisfy his enemy. Besides, these people are unstable; they do not even indulge in hatred long. Do you know if your comrade has taken any part in political intrigue?"

"It's most unlikely; he would make a very poor conspirator," Jake replied.

"Then have you heard of any señorita, or perhaps a half-breed girl who has taken his fancy?"

"No," said Jake. "Dick is not that kind."

He thought Don Sebastian had been clearing the ground, eliminating possibilities to which he did not attach much weight, and waited with interest for his remarks.

"Well," said the Spaniard, "I think you and the man, Payne, should watch over your friend, but it might be better if you did not tell him you are doing so or ask him any questions, and I would sooner you did not mention this interview. If, however, anything suspicious happens again, it might be an advantage if

you let me know. You can send word to me at the hotel."

"Not at Kenwardine's?"

Don Sebastian gave him a quiet glance, but Jake thought it was keenly observant and remembered how, one night when a messenger entered Kenwardine's patio, Richter, the German, had stood where he obstructed the Spaniard's view.

"No," he said, "I should prefer the hotel. Will you promise?"

"I will," Jake answered impulsively. "However, you seem to suggest that I should leave my partner to grapple with this thing himself and I don't like that. If he's up against any danger, I want to butt in. Dick's no fool, but there are respects in which he's not very keen. His mind's fixed on concrete, and when he gets off it his imagination's sometimes rather weak ——"

He stopped, feeling that he must not seem to censure his friend, and Don Sebastian nodded with a twinkle of amusement.

"I think I understand. There are, however, men of simple character and no cunning who are capable of going far and sometimes surprise the friends who do not know them very well. I cannot tell if Señor Brandon is one of these, but it is not impossible. After all, it is often the clever man who makes the worst mistakes; and on the whole I imagine it would be wiser to leave your comrade alone."

He got up and laid his hand on Jake's arm with a friendly gesture. "Now I will put you on your way, and if you feel puzzled or alarmed in future, you can come to me."

CHAPTER XXI

DICK MAKES A BOLD VENTURE

SOME delicate and important work was being done, and Stuyvesant had had his lunch sent up to the dam. Bethune and Dick joined him afterwards, and sat in the shade of a big traveling crane. Stuyvesant and Dick were hot and dirty, for it was not their custom to be content with giving orders when urgent work was going on. Bethune looked languid and immaculately neat. His speciality was mathematics, and he said he did not see why the man with mental talents should dissipate his energy by using his hands.

"It's curious about that French liner," Stuyvesant presently remarked. "I understand her passengers have been waiting since yesterday and she hasn't arrived."

"The last boat cut out Santa Brigida without notice," Bethune replied. "My opinion of the French is that they're a pretty casual lot."

"On the surface. They smile and shrug where we set our teeth, but when you get down to bed-rock you don't find much difference. I thought as you do, until I went over there and saw a people that run us close for steady, intensive industry. Their small cultivators are simply great. I'd like to put them on our poorer land in the Middle West, where we're con-

tent with sixteen bushels of wheat that's most fit for chicken feed to the acre. Then what they don't know about civil engineering isn't worth learning."

Bethune made a gesture of agreement. "They're certainly fine engineers and they're putting up a pretty good fight just now, but these Latins puzzle me. Take the Iberian branch of the race, for example. We have Spanish peons here who'll stand for as much work and hardship as any Anglo-Saxon I've met. Then an educated Spaniard's hard to beat for intellectual subtlety. Chess is a game that's suited to my turn of mind, but I've been badly whipped in Santa Brigida. They've brains and application, and yet they don't progress. What's the matter with them, anyway?"

"I expect they can't formulate a continuous policy and stick to it, and they keep brains and labor too far apart; the two should coordinate. But I wonder what's holding up the mail boat."

"Do they know when she left the last port?" Dick, who had listened impatiently, asked with concealed interest.

"They do. It's a short run and she ought to have arrived yesterday morning."

"The Germans can't have got her. They have no commerce-destroyers in these waters," Bethune remarked, with a glance at Dick. "Your navy corralled the lot, I think."

Dick wondered why Bethune looked at him, but he answered carelessly: "So one understands. But it's strange the French company cut out the last call. There was a big quantity of freight on the mole."

"It looks as if the agent had suspected something," Stuyvesant replied. "However, that's not our affair,

and you want to get busy and have your specifications and cost-sheets straight when Fuller comes."

"Then Fuller is coming back!" Dick exclaimed.

"He'll be here to-morrow night. I imagined Bethune had told you about the cablegram he sent."

"He didn't; I expect he thought his getting a scratch lunch more important," Dick replied, looking at his watch. "Well, I must see everything's ready before the boys make a start."

He went away with swift, decided steps through the scorching heat, and Stuyvesant smiled.

"There you have a specimen of the useful Anglo-Saxon type. I don't claim that he's a smart man all round, but he can concentrate on his work and put over what he takes in hand. You wouldn't go to him for a brilliant plan, but give him an awkward job and he'll make good. I expect he'll get a lift up when Fuller has taken a look round."

"He deserves it," Bethune agreed.

Though the heat was intense and the glare from the white dam dazzling, Dick found work something of a relief. It was his habit to fix his mind upon the task in which he was engaged; but of late his thoughts had been occupied by Clare and conjectures about the Adexe coaling station and the strange black-funnel boat. The delay in the French liner's arrival had made the matter look more urgent, but he had now an excuse for putting off its consideration. His duty to his employer came first. There were detailed plans that must be worked out before Fuller came and things he would want to know, and Dick sat up late at night in order to have the answers ready.

Fuller arrived, and after spending a few days at the

works came to Dick's shack one evening. For an hour he examined drawings and calculations, asking Jake a sharp question now and then, and afterwards sent him away.

"You can put up the papers now," he said. "We'll go out on the veranda. It's cooler there."

He dropped into a canvas chair, for the air was stagnant and enervating, and looked down at the clustering lights beside the sea for a time. Then he said abruptly: "Jake seems to know his business. You have taught him well."

"He learned most himself," Dick answered modestly.

"Well," said Fuller with some dryness, "that's the best plan, but you put him on the right track and kept him there; I guess I know my son. Has he made trouble for you in other ways?"

"None worth mentioning."

Fuller gave him a keen glance and then indicated the lights of the town.

"That's the danger-spot. Does he go down there often?"

"No. I make it as difficult as possible, but can't stop him altogether."

Fuller nodded. "I guess you used some tact, because he likes you and you'd certainly have had trouble if you'd snubbed him up too hard. Anyway, I'm glad to acknowledge that you have put me in your debt. You can see how I was fixed. Bethune's not the man to guide a headstrong lad, and Stuyvesant's his boss. If he'd used any official pressure, Jake would have kicked. That's why I wanted a steady partner for him who had no actual authority."

"In a sense, you ran some risk in choosing me."

"I don't know that I chose you, to begin with," Fuller answered with a twinkle. "I imagine my daughter made me think as I did, but I'm willing to state that her judgment was good. We'll let that go. You have seen Jake at his work; do you think he'll make an engineer?"

"Yes," said Dick, and then recognizing friendship's claim, added bluntly: "But he'll make a better artist. He has the gift."

"Well," said Fuller, in a thoughtful tone, "we'll talk of it again. In the meantime, he's learning how big jobs are done and dollars are earned, and that's a liberal education. However, I've a proposition here I'd like your opinion of."

Dick's heart beat as he read the document his employer handed him. It was a formal agreement by which he engaged his services to Fuller until the irrigation work was completed, in return for a salary that he thought remarkably good.

"It's much more than I had any reason to expect," he said with some awkwardness. "In fact, although I don't know that I have been of much help to Jake, I'd sooner you didn't take this way of repaying me. One would prefer not to mix friendship with business."

"Yours is not a very common view," Fuller replied, smiling. "However, I'm merely offering to buy your professional skill, and want to know if you're satisfied with my terms."

"They're generous," said Dick with emotion, for he saw what the change in his position might enable him to do. "There's only one thing: the agreement

is to stand until the completion of the dam. What will happen afterwards?"

"Then if I have no more use for you here, I think I can promise to find you as good or better job. Is that enough?"

Dick gave him a grateful look. "It's difficult to tell you how I feel about it, but I'll do my best to make good and show that you have not been mistaken."

"That's all right," said Fuller, getting up. "Sign the document when you can get a witness and let me have it."

He went away and Dick sat down and studied the agreement with a beating heart. He found his work engrossing, he liked the men he was associated with, and saw his way to making his mark in his profession, but there was another cause for the triumphant thrill he felt. Clare must be separated from Kenwardine before she was entangled in his dangerous plots, and he had brooded over his inability to come to her rescue. Now, however, one obstacle was removed. He could offer her some degree of comfort if she could be persuaded to marry him. It was obvious that she must be taken out of her father's hands as soon as possible, and he determined to try to gain her consent next morning, though he was very doubtful of his success.

When he reached the house, Clare was sitting at a table in the patio with some work in her hand. Close by, the purple creeper spread across the wall, and the girl's blue eyes and thin lilac dress harmonized with its deeper color. Her face and half-covered arms showed pure white against the background, but the delicate pink that had once relieved the former was

now less distinct. The hot, humid climate had begun to set its mark on her, and Dick thought she looked anxious and perplexed.

She glanced up when she heard his step, and moving quietly forward he stopped on the opposite side of the table with his hand on a chair. He knew there was much against him and feared a rebuff, but delay might be dangerous and he could not wait. Standing quietly resolute, he fixed his eyes on the girl's face.

"Is your father at home, Miss Kenwardine?" he asked.

"No," said Clare. "He went out some time ago, and I cannot tell when he will come back. Do you want to see him?"

"I don't know yet. It depends."

He thought she was surprised and curious, but she said nothing, and nerving himself for the plunge, he resumed: "I came to see you in the first place. I'm afraid you'll be astonished, Clare, but I want to know if you will marry me."

She moved abruptly, turned her head for a moment, and then looked up at him while the color gathered in her face. Her expression puzzled Dick, but he imagined that she was angry.

"I am astonished. Isn't it a rather extraordinary request, after what you said on board the launch?"

"No," said Dick, "it's very natural from my point of view. You see, I fell in love with you the first time we met; but I got into disgrace soon afterwards and have had a bad time since. This made it impossible for me to tell you what I felt; but things are beginning to improve ——"

He stopped, seeing no encouragement in her expres-

sion, for Clare was fighting a hard battle. His blunt simplicity made a strong appeal. She had liked and trusted him when he had with callow but honest chivalry offered her his protection one night in England and he had developed fast since then. Hardship had strengthened and in a sense refined him. He looked resolute and soldierlike as he waited. Still, for his sake as well as hers, she must refuse.

"Then you must be easily moved," she said. "You knew nothing about me."

"I'd seen you; that was quite enough," Dick declared and stopped. Her look was gentler and he might do better if he could lessen the distance between them and take her hand; he feared he had been painfully matter-of-fact. Perhaps he was right, but the table stood in the way, and if he moved round it, she would take alarm. It was exasperating to be baulked by a piece of furniture.

"Besides," he resumed, "when everybody doubted me, you showed your confidence. You wrote and said ——"

"But you told me you tore up the letter," Clare interrupted.

Dick got confused. "I did; I was a fool, but the way things had been going was too much for me. You ought to understand and try to make allowances."

"I cannot understand why you want to marry a girl you think a thief."

Pulling himself together, Dick gave her a steady look. "I can't let that pass, though if I begin to argue I'm lost. In a way, I'm at your mercy, because my defense can only make matters worse. But I tried to explain on board the launch."

"The explanation wasn't very convincing," Clare remarked, turning her head. "Do you still believe I took your papers?"

"The plans were in my pocket when I reached your house," said Dick, who saw he must be frank. "I don't know that you took them, and if you did, I wouldn't hold you responsible; but they were taken."

"You mean that you blame my father for their loss?"

Dick hesitated. He felt that she was giving him a last opportunity, but he could not seize it.

"If I pretended I didn't blame him, you would find me out and it would stand between us. I wish I could say I'd dropped the papers somewhere or find some other way; but the truth is best."

Clare turned to him with a hot flush and an angry sparkle in her eyes.

"Then it's unthinkable that you should marry the daughter of the man whom you believe ruined you. Don't you see that you can't separate me from my father? We must stand together."

"No," said Dick doggedly, knowing that he was beaten, "I don't see that. I want you; I want to take you away from surroundings and associations that must jar. Perhaps it was foolish to think you would come, but you helped to save my life when I was ill, and I believe I was then something more to you than a patient. Why have you changed?"

She looked at him with a forced and rather bitter smile. "Need you ask? Can't you, or won't you, understand? Could I marry my victim, which is what you are if your suspicions are justified? If they are not, you have offered me an insult I cannot forgive.

It is unbearable to be thought the daughter of a thief."

Dick nerved himself for a last effort. "What does your father's character matter? I want you. You will be safe from everything that could hurt you if you come to me." He hesitated and then went on in a hoarse, determined voice: "You must come. I can't let you live among those plotters and gamblers. It's impossible. Clare, when I was ill and you thought me asleep, I watched you sitting in the moonlight. Your face was wonderfully gentle and I thought ——"

She rose and stopped him with a gesture. "There is no more to be said, Mr. Brandon. I cannot marry you, and if you are generous, you will go."

Dick, who had been gripping the chair hard, let his hand fall slackly and turned away. Clare watched him cross the patio, and stood tensely still, fighting against an impulse to call him back as he neared the door. Then as he vanished into the shadow of the arch she sat down with sudden limpness and buried her hot face in her hands.

CHAPTER XXII

THE OFFICIAL MIND

ON the evening after Clare's refusal, Dick entered the principal café at Santa Brigida. The large, open-fronted room was crowded, for, owing to the duty, newspapers were not generally bought by the citizens, who preferred to read them at the cafés, and the *Diario* had just come in. The eagerness to secure a copy indicated that something important had happened, and after listening to the readers' remarks, Dick gathered that the French liner had sunk and a number of her passengers were drowned. This, however, did not seem to account for the angry excitement some of the men showed, and Dick waited until a polite half-breed handed him the newspaper.

A ship's lifeboat, filled with exhausted passengers, had reached a bay some distance along the coast, and it appeared from their stories that the liner was steaming across a smooth sea in the dark when a large vessel, which carried no lights, emerged from a belt of haze and came towards her. The French captain steered for the land, hoping to reach territorial waters, where he would be safe, but the stranger was faster and opened fire with a heavy gun. The liner held on, although she was twice hit, but after a time there was an explosion below and her colored firemen ran up on deck. Then the ship stopped, boats were hoisted out,

and it was believed that several got safely away, though only one had so far reached the coast. This boat was forced to pass the attacking vessel rather close, and an officer declared that she looked like one of the Spanish liners and her funnel was black.

Dick gave the newspaper to the next man and sat still with knitted brows, for his suspicions were suddenly confirmed. The raider had a black funnel, and was no doubt the ship he had seen steering for Adexe. An enemy commerce-destroyer was lurking about the coast, and she could not be allowed to continue her deadly work, which her resemblance to the Spanish vessels would make easier. For all that, Dick saw that anything he might do would cost him much, since Clare had said that she and Kenwardine must stand together. This was true, in a sense, because if Kenwardine got into trouble, she would share his disgrace and perhaps his punishment. Moreover, she might think he had been unjustly treated and blame Dick for helping to persecute him. Things were getting badly entangled, and Dick, leaning back in his chair, vacantly looked about.

The men had gathered in groups round the tables, their dark faces showing keen excitement as they argued with dramatic gestures about international law. For the most part, they looked indignant, but Dick understood that they did not expect much from their Government. One said the English would send a cruiser and something might be done by the Americans; another explained the Monroe Doctrine in a high-pitched voice. Dick, however, tried not to listen, because difficulties he had for some time seen approaching must now be faced.

He had been forced to leave England in disgrace, and his offense would be remembered if he returned. Indeed, he had come to regard America as his home, but patriotic feelings he had thought dead had awakened and would not be denied. He might still be able to serve his country and meant to do so, though it was plain that this would demand a sacrifice. Love and duty clashed, but he must do his best and leave the rest to luck. Getting up with sudden resolution, he left the café and went to the British consulate.

When he stopped outside the building, to which the royal arms were fixed, he remarked that two peons were lounging near, but, without troubling about them, knocked at the door. There was only a Vice-Consul at Santa Brigida, and the post, as sometimes happens, was held by a merchant, who had, so a clerk stated, already gone home. Dick, however, knew where he lived and determined to seek him at his house. He looked round once or twice on his way there, without seeing anybody who seemed to be following him, but when he reached the iron gate he thought a dark figure stopped in the gloom across the street. Still, it might only be a citizen going into his house, and Dick rang the bell.

He was shown on to a balcony where the Vice-Consul sat with his Spanish wife and daughter at a table laid with wine and fruit. He did not look pleased at being disturbed, but told Dick to sit down when the ladies withdrew.

"Now," he said, "you can state your business, but I have an appointment in a quarter of an hour."

Dick related his suspicions about the coaling company, and described what he had seen at Adexe and

the visit of the black-funnel boat, but before he had gone far, realized that he was wasting his time. The Vice-Consul's attitude was politely indulgent.

"This is a rather extraordinary tale," he remarked when Dick stopped.

"I have told you what I saw and what I think it implies," Dick answered with some heat.

"Just so. I do not doubt your honesty, but it is difficult to follow your arguments."

"It oughtn't to be difficult. You have heard that the French liner was sunk by a black-funnel boat."

"Black funnels are common. Why do you imagine the vessel you saw was an auxiliary cruiser?"

"Because her crew looked like navy men. They were unusually numerous and were busy at drill."

"Boat or fire drill probably. They often exercise them at it on board passenger ships. Besides, I think you stated that it was dark."

Dick pondered for a few moments. He had heard that Government officials were hard to move, and knew that, in hot countries, Englishmen who marry native wives sometimes grow apathetic and succumb to the climatic lethargy. But this was not all: he had to contend against the official dislike of anything informal and unusual. Had he been in the navy, his warning would have received attention, but as he was a humble civilian he had, so to speak, no business to know anything about such matters.

"Well," he said, "you can make inquiries and see if my conclusions are right."

The Vice-Consul smiled. "That is not so. You can pry into the coaling company's affairs and, if you are caught, it would be looked upon as an individual

impertinence. If I did anything of the kind, it would reflect upon the Foreign Office and compromise our relations with a friendly state. The Adexe wharf is registered according to the laws of this country as being owned by a native company."

"Then go to the authorities and tell them what you know."

"The difficulty is that I know nothing except that you have told me a somewhat improbable tale."

"But you surely don't mean to let the raider do what she likes? Her next victim may be a British vessel."

"I imagine the British admiralty will attend to that, and I have already sent a cablegram announcing the loss of the French boat."

Dick saw that he was doubted and feared that argument would be useless, but he would not give in.

"A raider must have coal and it's not easy to get upon this coast," he resumed. "You could render her harmless by cutting off supplies."

"Do you know much about international law and how far it prohibits a neutral country from selling coal to a belligerent?"

"I don't know anything about it; but if our Foreign Office is any good, they ought to be able to stop the thing," Dick answered doggedly.

"Then let me try to show you how matters stand. We will suppose that your suspicions were correct and I thought fit to make representations to the Government of this country. What do you think would happen?"

"They'd be forced to investigate your statements."

"Exactly. The head of a department would be

asked to report. You probably know that every official whose business brings him into touch with it is in the coaling company's pay; I imagine there is not a foreign trader here who does not get small favors in return for bribes. Bearing this in mind, it is easy to understand what the report would be. I should have shown that we suspected the good faith of a friendly country, and there would be nothing gained."

"Still, you can't let the matter drop," Dick insisted.

"Although you have given me no proof of your statements, which seem to be founded on conjectures, I have not said that I intend to let it drop. In the meantime I am entitled to ask for some information about yourself. You look like an Englishman and have not been here long. Did you leave home after the war broke out?"

"Yes," said Dick, who saw where he was leading, "very shortly afterwards."

"Why? Men like you are needed for the army."

Dick colored, but looked his questioner steadily in the face.

"I was in the army. They turned me out."

The Vice-Consul made a gesture. "I have nothing to do with the reason for this; but you can see my difficulty. You urge me to meddle with things that require very delicate handling and with which my interference would have to be justified. No doubt, you can imagine the feelings of my superiors when I admitted that I acted upon hints given me by a stranger in the employ of Americans, who owned to having been dismissed from the British army."

Dick got up, with his face firmly set.

"Very well. There's no more to be said. I won't trouble you again."

Leaving the house, he walked moodily back to the end of the line. The Vice-Consul was a merchant and thought first of his business, which might suffer if he gained the ill-will of corrupt officials. He would, no doubt, move if he were forced, but he would demand incontestable proof, which Dick feared he could not find. Well, he had done his best and been rebuffed, and now the temptation to let the matter drop was strong. To go on would bring him into conflict with Kenwardine, and perhaps end in his losing Clare, but he must go on. For all that, he would leave the Vice-Consul alone and trust to getting some help from his employer's countrymen. If it could be shown that the enemy was establishing a secret base for naval operations at Adexe, he thought the Americans would protest. The Vice-Consul, however, had been of some service by teaching him the weakness of his position. He must strengthen it by carefully watching what went on, and not interfere until he could do so with effect. Finding the locomotive waiting, he returned to his shack and with an effort fixed his mind upon the plans of some work that he must superintend in the morning.

For the next few days he was busily occupied. A drum of the traveling crane broke and as it could not be replaced for a time, Dick put up an iron derrick of Bethune's design to lower the concrete blocks into place. They were forced to use such material as they could find, and the gang of peons who handled the chain-tackle made a poor substitute for a steam engine. In consequence, the work progressed slowly and

Stuyvesant ordered it to be carried on into the night. Jake and Bethune grumbled, but Dick found the longer hours and extra strain something of a relief. He had now no leisure to indulge in painful thoughts; besides, while he was busy at the dam he could not watch Kenwardine, and his duty to his employer justified his putting off an unpleasant task.

One hot night he stood, soaked with perspiration and dressed in soiled duck clothes, some distance beneath the top of the dam, which broke down to a lower level at the spot. There was no moon, but a row of blast-lamps that grew dimmer as they receded picked out the tall embankment with jets of pulsating flame. Glimmering silvery gray in the light, it cut against the gloom in long sweeping lines, with a molded rib that added a touch of grace where the slope got steeper towards its top. This was Dick's innovation. He had fought hard for it and when Jake supported him Stuyvesant had written to Fuller, who sanctioned the extra cost. The rib marked the fine contour of the structure and fixed its bold curve upon the eye.

Where the upper surface broke off, two gangs of men stood beside the tackles that trailed away from the foot of the derrick. The flame that leaped with a roar from a lamp on a tripod picked out some of the figures with harsh distinctness, but left the rest dim and blurred. Dick stood eight or nine feet below, with the end of the line, along which the blocks were brought, directly above his head. A piece of rail had been clamped across the metals to prevent the truck running over the edge. Jake stood close by on the downward slope of the dam. Everything was

ready for the lowering of the next block, but they had a few minutes to wait.

"That rib's a great idea," Jake remarked. "Tones up the whole work; it's curious what you can do with a flowing line, but it must be run just right. Make it the least too flat and you get harshness, too full and the effect's vulgarly pretty or voluptuous. Beauty's severely chaste and I allow, as far as form goes, this dam's a looker." He paused and indicated the indigo sky, flaring lights, and sweep of pearly stone. "Then if you want color, you can revel in silver, orange, and blue."

Dick, who nodded, shared Jake's admiration. He had helped to build the dam and, in a sense, had come to love it. Any defacement or injury to it would hurt him. Just then a bright, blinking spot emerged from the dark at the other end of the line and increased in radiance as it came forward, flickering along the slope of stone. It was the head-lamp of the locomotive that pushed the massive concrete block they waited for. The block cut off the light immediately in front of and below it, and when the engine, snorting harshly, approached the edge of the gap somebody shouted and steam was cut off. The truck stopped just short of the rail fastened across the line, and Dick looked up.

The blast-lamp flung its glare upon the engine and the rays of the powerful head-light drove horizontally into the dark, but the space beyond the broken end of the dam was kept in shadow by the block, and the glitter above dazzled his eyes.

"Swing the derrick-boom and tell the engineer to come on a yard or two," he said.

There was a patter of feet, a rattle of chains, and somebody called: *"Adelante locomotura!"*

The engine snorted, the wheels ground through the fragments of concrete scattered about the line, and the big dark mass rolled slowly forward. It seemed to Dick to be going farther than it ought, but he had ascertained that the guard-rail was securely fastened. As he watched the front of the truck, Jake, who stood a few feet to one side, leaned out and seized his shoulder.

"Jump!" he cried, pulling him forward.

Dick made an awkward leap, and alighting on the steep front of the dam, fell heavily on his side. As he clutched the stones to save himself from sliding down, a black mass plunged from the line above and there was a deafening crash as it struck the spot he had left. Then a shower of fragments fell upon him and he choked amidst a cloud of dust. Hoarse shouts broke out above, and he heard men running about the dam as he got up, half dazed.

"Are you all right, Jake?" he asked.

"Not a scratch," was the answer; and Dick, scrambling up the bank, called for a lamp.

It was brought by a big mulatto, and Dick held up the light. The last-fitted block of the ribbed course was split in two, and the one that had fallen was scattered about in massive broken lumps. Amidst these lay the guard-rail, and the front wheels of the truck hung across the gap above. There was other damage, and Dick frowned as he looked about.

"We'll be lucky if we get the broken molding out in a day, and I expect we'll have to replace two of the lower blocks," he said. "It's going to be an awk-

ward and expensive job now that the cement has set."

"Is that all?" Jake asked with a forced grin.

"It's enough," said Dick. "However, we'll be better able to judge in the daylight."

Then he turned to the engineer, who was standing beside the truck, surrounded by excited peons. "How did it happen?"

"I had my hand on the throttle when I got the order to go ahead, and let her make a stroke or two, reckoning the guard-rail would snub up the car. I heard the wheels clip and slammed the link-gear over, because it looked as if she wasn't going to stop. When she reversed, the couplings held the car and the block slipped off."

"Are you sure you didn't give her too much steam?"

"No, sir. I've been doing this job quite a while, and know just how smart a push she wants. It was the guard-rail slipping that made the trouble."

"I can't understand why it did slip. The fastening clamps were firm when I looked at them."

"Well," remarked the engineer, "the guard's certainly in the pit, and I felt her give as soon as the car-wheels bit."

Dick looked hard at him and thought he spoke the truth. He was a steady fellow and a good driver.

"Put your engine in the house and take down the feed-pump you were complaining about. We won't want her to-morrow," he said, and dismissing the men, returned to his shack, where he sat down rather limply on the veranda.

"I don't understand the thing," he said to Jake. "The guard-rail's heavy and I watched the smith make

the clamps we fixed it with. One claw went over the rail, the other under the flange of the metal that formed the track, and sudden pressure would jamb the guard down. Then, not long before the accident, I hardened up the clamp."

"You hit it on the back?"

"Of course. I'd have loosened the thing by hitting the front."

"That's so," Jake agreed, somewhat dryly. "We'll look for the clamps in the morning. But you didn't seem very anxious to get out of the way."

"I expect I forgot to thank you for warning me. Anyhow, you know ——"

"Yes, I know," said Jake. "You didn't think about it; your mind was on your job. Still, I suppose you see that if you'd been a moment later you'd have been smashed pretty flat?"

Dick gave him a quick glance. There was something curious about Jake's tone, but Dick knew he did not mean to emphasize the value of his warning. It was plain that he had had a very narrow escape, but since one must be prepared for accidents in heavy engineering work, he did not see why this should jar his nerves. Yet they were jarred. The danger he had scarcely heeded had now a disturbing effect. He could imagine what would have happened had he delayed his leap. However, he was tired, and perhaps rather highly strung, and he got up.

"It's late, and we had better go to bed," he said.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE CLAMP

WHEN work began next morning, Jake asked Dick if he should order the peons to search for the clamps that had held the guard-rail.

"I think not," said Dick. "It would be better if you looked for the things yourself."

"Very well. Perhaps you're right."

Dick wondered how much Jake suspected, particularly as he did not appear to be searching for anything when he moved up and down among the broken concrete. Half an hour later, when none of the peons were immediately about, he came up with his hand in his pocket and indicated a corner beside a block where there was a little shade and they were not likely to be overlooked.

"I've got one," he remarked.

When they sat down Jake took out a piece of thick iron about six inches long, forged into something like the shape of a U, though the curve was different and one arm was shorter than the other. Much depended on the curve, for the thing was made on the model of an old-fashioned but efficient clamp that carpenters sometimes use for fastening work to a bench. A blow or pressure on one part wedged it fast, but a sharp tap on the other enabled it to be lifted off. This was convenient, because as the work progressed, the

track along the dam had to be lengthened and the guard fixed across a fresh pair of rails.

Taking the object from Jake, Dick examined it carefully. He thought he recognized the dint where he had struck the iron, and then, turning it over, noted another mark. This had been made recently, because the surface of the iron was bright where the hammer had fallen, and a blow there would loosen the clamp. He glanced at Jake, who nodded.

"It looks very suspicious, but that's all. You can't tell how long the mark would take to get dull. Besides, we have moved the guard two or three times in the last few days."

"That's true," said Dick. "Still, I wedged the thing up shortly before the accident. It has stood a number of shocks; in fact, it can't be loosened by pressure on the back. When do you *think* the last blow was struck?"

"After yours," Jake answered meaningly.

"Then the probability is that somebody wanted the truck to fall into the hole and smash the block."

"Yes," said Jake, who paused and looked hard at Dick. "But I'm not sure that was all he wanted. You were standing right under the block, and if I hadn't been a little to one side, where the lights didn't dazzle me, the smashing of a lot of concrete wouldn't have been the worst damage."

Dick said nothing, but his face set hard as he braced himself against the unnerving feeling that had troubled him on the previous night. The great block had not fallen by accident; it looked as if somebody had meant to take his life. The cunning of the attempt daunted him. The blow had been struck in a

manner that left him a very slight chance of escape; and his subtle antagonist might strike again.

"What are you going to do about it?" Jake resumed.

"Nothing," said Dick.

Jake looked at him in surprise. "Don't you see what you're up against?"

"It's pretty obvious; but if I ask questions, I'll find out nothing and show that I'm suspicious. If we let the thing go as an accident, we may catch the fellow off his guard."

"My notion is that you know more than you mean to tell. Now you began by taking care of me, but it looks as if the matter would end in my taking care of you. Seems to me you need it and I don't like to see you playing a lone hand."

Dick gave him a grateful smile. "If I see how you can help, I'll let you know. In the meantime, you'll say nothing to imply that I'm on the watch."

"Well," said Jake, grinning, "if you can bluff Stuyvesant, you'll be smarter than I thought. You're a rather obvious person and he's not a fool."

He went away, but Dick lighted a cigarette and sat still in the shade. He was frankly daunted, but did not mean to stop, for he saw that he was following the right clue. His reason for visiting the Adexe wharf had been guessed. He had been watched when he went to the Vice-Consul, and it was plain that his enemies thought he knew enough to be dangerous. The difficulty was that he did not know who they were. He hated to think that Kenwardine was a party to the plot, but this, while possible, was by no means certain. At Santa Brigida, a man's life was

not thought of much account, and it would, no doubt, have been enough if Kenwardine had intimated that Dick might cause trouble; but then Kenwardine must have known what was likely to follow his hint.

After all, however, this was not very important. He must be careful, but do nothing to suggest that he understood the risk he ran. If his antagonists thought him stupid, so much the better. He saw the difficulty of playing what Jake called a lone hand against men skilled in the intricate game; but he could not ask for help until he was sure of his ground. Besides, he must find a way of stopping Kenwardine without involving Clare. In the meantime he had a duty to Fuller, and throwing away his cigarette, resumed his work.

Two or three days later he met Kenwardine in a café where he was waiting for a man who supplied some stores to the camp. When Kenwardine saw Dick he crossed the floor and sat down at his table. His Spanish dress became him, he looked polished and well-bred, and it was hard to think him a confederate of half-breed ruffians who would not hesitate about murder. But Dick wondered whether Clare had told him about his proposal.

"I suppose I may congratulate you on your recent promotion? You certainly deserve it," Kenwardine remarked with an ironical smile. "I imagine your conscientiousness and energy are unusual, but perhaps at times rather inconvenient."

"Thanks!" said Dick. "How did you hear about the matter?"

"In Santa Brigida, one hears everything that goes

on. We have nothing much to do but talk about our neighbors' affairs."

Dick wondered whether Kenwardine meant to hint that as his time was largely unoccupied he had only a small part in managing the coaling business, but he said: "We are hardly your neighbors at the camp."

"I suppose that's true. We certainly don't see you often."

This seemed to indicate that Kenwardine did not know about Dick's recent visit. He could have no reason for hiding his knowledge, and it looked as if Clare did not tell her father everything.

"You have succeeded in keeping your young friend out of our way," Kenwardine resumed. "Still, as he hasn't your love of work and sober character, there's some risk of a reaction if you hold him in too hard. Jake's at an age when it's difficult to be satisfied with cement."

Dick laughed. "I really did try to keep him, but was helped by luck. We have been unusually busy at the dam and although I don't know that his love for cement is strong he doesn't often leave a half-finished job."

"If you work upon his feelings in that way, I expect you'll beat me; but after all, I'm not scheming to entangle the lad. He's a bright and amusing youngster, but there wouldn't be much profit in exploiting him. However, you have had some accidents at the dam, haven't you?"

Dick was immediately on his guard, but he answered carelessly: "We broke a crane-drum, which delayed us."

"And didn't a truck fall down the embankment and do some damage?"

"It did," said Dick. "We had a big molded block, which cost a good deal to make, smashed to pieces, and some others split. I had something of an escape, too, because I was standing under the block."

He was watching Kenwardine and thought his expression changed and his easy pose stiffened. His self-control was good, but Dick imagined he was keenly interested and surprised.

"Then you ran a risk of being killed?"

"Yes. Jake, however, saw the danger and warned me just before the block fell."

"That was lucky. But you have a curious temperament. When we began to talk of the accidents, you remembered the damage to Fuller's property before the risk to your life."

"Well," said Dick, "you see I wasn't hurt, but the damage still keeps us back."

"How did the truck run off the line? I should have thought you'd have taken precautions against anything of the kind."

Dick pondered. He believed Kenwardine really was surprised to hear he had nearly been crushed by the block; but the fellow was clever and had begun to talk about the accidents. He must do nothing to rouse his suspicions, and began a painstaking account of the matter, explaining that the guard-rail had got loose, but saying nothing about the clamps being tampered with. Indeed, the trouble he took about the explanation was in harmony with his character and his interest in his work, and presently Kenwardine looked bored.

"I quite understand the thing," he said, and got up as the man Dick was waiting for came towards the table.

The merchant did not keep Dick long, and he left the café feeling satisfied. Kenwardine had probably had him watched and had had something to do with the theft of the sheet from his blotting pad, but knew nothing about the attempt upon his life. After hearing about it, he understood why the accident happened, but had no cause to think that Dick knew, and some of his fellow conspirators were responsible for this part of the plot. Dick wondered whether he would try to check them now he did know, because if they tried again, they would do so with Kenwardine's tacit consent.

A few days later, he was sitting with Bethune and Jake one evening when Stuyvesant came in and threw a card, printed with the flag of a British steamship company, on the table.

"I'm not going, but you might like to do so," he said.

Dick, who was nearest, picked up the card. It was an invitation to a dinner given to celebrate the first call of a large new steamship at Santa Brigida, and he imagined it had been sent to the leading citizens and merchants who imported goods by the company's vessels. After glancing at it, he passed it on.

"I'll go," Bethune remarked. "After the Spartan simplicity we practise at the camp, it will be a refreshing change to eat a well-served dinner in a mailboat's saloon, though I've no great admiration for British cookery."

"It can't be worse than the dago kind we're used

to," Jake broke in. "What's the matter with it, anyhow?"

"It's like the British character, heavy and unchanging," Bethune replied. "A London hotel menu, with English beer and whisky, in the tropics! Only people without imagination would offer it to their guests; and then they've printed a list of the ports she's going to at the bottom. Would any other folk except perhaps the Germans, couple an invitation with a hint that they were ready to trade? If a Spaniard comes to see you on business, he talks for half an hour about politics or your health, and apologizes for mentioning such a thing as commerce when he comes to the point."

"The British plan has advantages," said Stuyvesant. "You know what you're doing when you deal with them."

"That's so. We know, for example, when this boat will arrive at any particular place and when she'll sail; while you can reckon on a French liner's being three or four days late and on the probability of a Spaniard's not turning up at all. But whether you have revolutions, wars, or tidal waves, the Britisher sails on schedule."

"There's some risk in that just now," Stuyvesant observed.

Bethune turned to Jake. "You had better come. The card states there'll be music, and the agent will hire Vallejo's band, which is pretty good. Guitars, mandolins, and fiddles on the poop, and señoritas in gauzy dresses flitting through graceful dances in the after well! The entertainment ought to appeal to your artistic taste."

"I'm going," Jake replied.

"So am I," said Dick.

Jake grinned. "That's rather sudden, isn't it? However, you may be needed to look after Bethune."

An evening or two later, they boarded the launch at the town mole. The sea was smooth and glimmered with phosphorescence in the shadow of the land, for the moon had not risen far above the mountains. Outside the harbor mouth, the liner's long, black hull cut against the dusky blue, the flowing curve of her sheer picked out by a row of lights. Over this rose three white tiers of passenger decks, pierced by innumerable bright points, with larger lights in constellations outside, while masts and funnels ran up, faintly indicated, into the gloom above. She scarcely moved to the lift of the languid swell, but as the undulations passed there was a pale-green shimmer about her waterline that magnified the height to her topmost deck. She looked unsubstantial, rather like a floating fairy palace than a ship, and as the noisy launch drew nearer Jake gave his imagination rein.

"She was made, just right, by magic; a ship of dreams," he said. "Look how she glimmers, splashed with cadmium radiance, on velvety blue; and her formlessness outside the lights wraps her in mystery. Yet you get a hint of swiftness."

"You know she has power and speed," Bethune interrupted.

"No," said Jake firmly, "it's not a matter of knowledge; she appeals to your imagination. You feel that airy fabric must travel like the wind." Then he turned to Dick, who was steering. "There's a boat ahead with a freight of señoritas in white and

orange gossamer; they know something about grace of line in this country. Are you going to rush past them, like a dull barbarian, in this kicking, snorting launch?"

"I'll make for the other side of the ship, if you like."

"You needn't go so far," Jake answered with a chuckle. "But you might muzzle your rackety engine."

Dick, who had seen the boat, gave her room enough, but let the engine run. He imagined that Jake's motive for slowing down might be misunderstood by the señoritas' guardian, since a touch of Moorish influence still colors the Spaniard's care of his women. As the launch swung to starboard her red light shone into the boat, and Dick recognized Don Sebastian sitting next a stout lady in a black dress. There were three or four girls beside them, and then Dick's grasp on the tiller stiffened, for the ruby beam picked out Clare's face. He thought it wore a tired look, but she turned her head, as if dazzled, and the light passed on, and Dick's heart beat as the boat dropped back into the gloom. Since Kenwardine had sent Clare with Don Sebastian, he could not be going, and Dick might find an opportunity for speaking to her alone. He meant to do so, although the interview would not be free from embarrassment. Then he avoided another boat, and stopping the engine, steered for the steamer's ladder.

CHAPTER XXIV

THE ALTERED SAILING LIST

WHEN dinner was over, Dick sat by himself in a quiet spot on the liner's quarter-deck. There was a tall, iron bulwark beside him, but close by this was replaced by netted rails, through which he caught the pale shimmer of the sea. The warm land-breeze had freshened and ripples splashed against the vessel's side, while every now and then a languid gurgle rose from about her waterline and the foam her plates threw off was filled with phosphorescent flame. A string band was playing on the poop, and passengers and guests moved through the intricate figures of a Spanish dance on the broad deck below. Their poses were graceful and their dress was picturesque, but Dick watched them listlessly.

He was not in a mood for dancing, for he had been working hard at the dam and his thoughts were disturbed. Clare had refused him, and although he did not accept her decision as final, he could see no way of taking her out of her father's hands, while he had made no progress towards unraveling the latter's plots. Kenwardine was not on board, but Dick had only seen Clare at some distance off across the table in the saloon. Moreover, he thought she must have taken some trouble to avoid meeting him.

Then he remembered the speeches made by the

visitors at dinner, and the steamship officers' replies. The former, colored by French and Spanish politeness and American wit, eulogized the power of the British navy and the courage of her merchant captains. There was war, they said, but British commerce went on without a check; goods shipped beneath the red ensign would be delivered safe in spite of storm and strife; Britannia, with trident poised, guarded the seas. For this the boldly-announced sailing list served as text, but Dick, who made allowances for exuberant Latin sentiment, noted the captain's response with some surprise.

His speech was flamboyant, and did not harmonize with the character of the man, who had called at the port before in command of another ship. He was gray-haired and generally reserved. Dick had not expected him to indulge in cheap patriotism, but he called the British ensign the meteor flag, defied its enemies, and declared that no hostile fleets could prevent his employers carrying their engagements out. Since the man was obviously sober, Dick supposed he was touting for business and wanted to assure the merchants that the sailings of the company's steamers could be relied upon. Still, this kind of thing was not good British form.

By and by Don Sebastian came down a ladder from the saloon deck with Clare behind him. Dick felt tempted to retire but conquered the impulse and the Spaniard came up.

"I have some business with the purser, who is waiting for me, but cannot find my señora," he explained, and Dick, knowing that local conventions forbade his leaving Clare alone, understood it as a request that

he should take care of her until the other's return.

"I should be glad to stay with Miss Kenwardine," he answered with a bow, and when Don Sebastian went off opened a deck-chair and turned to the girl.

"You see how I was situated!" he said awkwardly.

Clare smiled as she sat down. "Yes; you are not to blame. Indeed, I do not see why you should apologize."

"Well," said Dick, "I hoped that I might meet you, though I feared you would sooner I did not. When I saw you on the ladder, I felt I ought to steal away, but must confess that I was glad when I found it was too late. Somehow, things seem to bring us into opposition. They have done so from the beginning."

"You're unnecessarily frank," Clare answered with a blush. "Since you couldn't steal away, wouldn't it have been better not to hint that I was anxious to avoid you? After all, I could have done so if I had really wanted."

"I expect that's true. Of course what happened when we last met couldn't trouble you as it troubled me."

"Are you trying to be tactful now?" Clare asked, smiling.

"No; it's my misfortune that I haven't much tact. If I had, I might be able to straighten matters out."

"Don't you understand that they can't be straightened out?"

"I don't," Dick answered stubbornly. "For all that, I won't trouble you again until I find a way out of the tangle."

Clare gave him a quick, disturbed look. "It would

be much better if you took it for granted that we must, to some extent, be enemies."

"No. I'm afraid your father and I are enemies, but that's not the same."

"It is; you can see that it must be," Clare insisted; and then, as if anxious to change the subject, went on: "He was too busy to bring me to-night so I came with Don Sebastian and his wife. It is not very gay in Santa Brigida and one gets tired of being alone."

Her voice fell a little as she concluded, and Dick, who understood something of her isolation from friends of her race, longed to take her in his arms and comfort her. Indeed, had the quarter-deck been deserted he might have tried, for he felt that her refusal had sprung from wounded pride and a sense of duty. There was something in her manner that hinted that it had not been easy to send him away. Yet he saw she could be firm and thought it wise to follow her lead.

"Then your father has been occupied lately," he remarked.

"Yes; he is often away. He goes to Adexe and is generally busy in the evenings. People come to see him and keep him talking in his room. Our friends no longer spend the evening in the patio."

Dick understood her. She wanted to convince him that Kenwardine was a business man and only gambled when he had nothing else to do. Indeed, her motive was rather pitifully obvious, and Dick knew that he had not been mistaken about her character. Clare had, no doubt, once yielded to her father's influence, but it was impossible that she took any part in his

plots. She was transparently honest; he knew this as he watched her color come and go.

"After all, I don't think you liked many of the people who came," he said.

"I liked Jake," she answered and stopped with a blush, while Dick felt half ashamed, because he had deprived her of the one companion she could trust.

"Well," he said, "it isn't altogether my fault that Jake doesn't come to see you. We have had some accidents that delayed the work and he has not been able to leave the dam."

He was silent for the next few minutes. Since Clare was eager to defend Kenwardine, she might be led to tell something about his doings from which a useful hint could be gathered, and Dick greatly wished to know who visited his house on business. Still, it was impossible that he should make the girl betray her father. The fight was between him and Kenwardine, and Clare must be kept outside it. With this resolve, he began to talk about the dancing, and soon afterward Jake came up and asked Clare for the next waltz. She smiled and gave Dick a challenging glance.

"Certainly," he said with a bow, and then turned to Jake. "As Miss Kenwardine has been put in my charge, you must bring her back."

Jake grinned as he promised and remarked as they went away: "Makes a good dueña, doesn't he? You can trust Dick to guard anything he's told to take care of. In fact, if I'd a sister I wanted to leave in safe hands——" He paused and laughed. "But that's the trouble. It was my sister who told him to take care of me."

Dick did not hear Clare's reply, but watched her

dance until Don Sebastian's wife came up. After that he went away, and presently strolled along the highest deck. This was narrower than the others, but was extended as far as the side of the ship by beams on which the boats were stowed. There were no rails, for passengers were not allowed up there; but Dick, who was preoccupied and moody, wanted to be alone. The moon had now risen above the mountains and the sea glittered between the shore and the ship. Looking down, he saw a row of boats rise and fall with the languid swell near her tall side, and the flash of the surf that washed the end of the mole. Then, taking out a cigarette, he strolled towards the captain's room, which stood behind the bridge, and stopped near it in the shadow of a big lifeboat.

The room was lighted, and the door and windows were half open because the night was hot. Carelessly glancing in, Dick saw Don Sebastian sitting at the table with the captain and engineer. This somewhat surprised him, for the purser transacted the ship's business and, so far as he knew, none of the other guests had been taken to the captain's room. He felt puzzled about Don Sebastian, whom he had met once or twice. The fellow had an air of authority and the smaller officials treated him with respect.

Something in the men's attitude indicated that they were talking confidentially, and Dick thought he had better go away without attracting their attention; but just then the captain turned in his chair and looked out. Dick decided to wait until he looked round again, and next moment Don Sebastian asked: "Have you plenty coal?"

"I think so," the engineer replied. "The after-

bunkers are full, but I'd have taken a few extra barge-loads here only I didn't want any of the shore peons to see how much I'd already got."

Dick did not understand this, because coal was somewhat cheaper and the facilities for shipping it were better at the boat's next port of call, to which it was only a two-days' run. Then the captain, who turned to Don Sebastian, remarked:

"Making the sailing list prominent was a happy thought, and it was lucky your friends backed us up well by their speeches. You saw how I took advantage of the lead they gave me, but I hope we haven't overdone the thing."

"No," said Don Sebastian thoughtfully; "I imagine nobody suspects anything yet."

"Perhaps you had better clear the ship soon, sir," said the engineer. "Steam's nearly up and it takes some coal——"

The room door slipped off its hook and swung wide open as the vessel rolled, and Dick, who could not withdraw unnoticed, decided to light his cigarette in order that the others might see that they were not alone. As he struck the match the captain got up.

"Who's that?" he asked.

"One of the foreign passengers, I expect; the mates can't keep them off this deck," the engineer replied. "I don't suppose the fellow knows English, but shall I send him down?"

"I think not. It might look as if we were afraid of being overheard."

Dick held the match to his cigarette for a moment or two before he threw it away, and as he walked past noted that Don Sebastian had come out on deck.

Indeed, he thought the man had seen his face and was satisfied, because he turned back into the room. Dick went down a ladder to the deck below, where he stopped and thought over what he had heard. It was plain that some precautions had been taken against the risk of capture, but he could not understand why Don Sebastian had been told about them.

By and by he thought he would speak to the purser, whom he knew, and went down the alleyway that led to his office. The door was hooked back, but the passage was narrow and a fat Spanish lady blocked the entrance. She was talking to the purser and Dick saw that he must wait until she had finished. A man stood a few yards behind her, unscrewing a flute, and as a folded paper that looked like music stuck out of his pocket he appeared to belong to the band.

"But it is Tuesday you arrive at Palomas!" the lady exclaimed.

"About then," the purser answered in awkward Castilian. "We may be a little late."

"But how much late?"

"I cannot tell. Perhaps a day or two."

"At dinner the captain said——"

"Just so. But he was speaking generally without knowing all the arrangements."

Dick could not see into the office, but heard the purser open a drawer and shuffle some papers, as if he wanted to get rid of his questioner.

"It is necessary that I know when we arrive," the lady resumed. "If it is not Tuesday, I must send a telegram."

The purser shut the drawer noisily, but just then

a bell rang overhead and the whistle blew to warn the visitors that they must go ashore.

"Then you must be quick," said the purser. "Write your message here and give it to me. You need not be disturbed. We will land you at Palomas."

The lady entered the office, but Dick thought her telegram would not be sent, and a moment later the captain's plan dawned on him. The ship would call at the ports named, but not in the order stated, and this was why she needed so much coal. She would probably steam first to the port farthest off and then work backward, and the sailing list was meant to put the raider off the track. The latter's commander, warned by spies who would send him the list, would think he knew where to find the vessel at any particular date, when, however, she would be somewhere else. Then Dick wondered why the musician was hanging about, and went up to him.

"The sobrecargo's busy," he said in English. "You'll be taken to sea unless you get up on deck."

"I no wanta el sobrecargo," the man replied in a thick, stupid voice. "The music is thirsty; I wanta drink."

The second-class bar was farther down the alleyway, and Dick, indicating it, turned back and made his way to the poop as fast as he could, for he did not think the man was as drunk as he looked. He found the musicians collecting their stands, and went up to the bandmaster.

"There's one of your men below who has been drinking too much caña," he said. "You had better look after him."

"But they are all here," the bandmaster answered, glancing round the poop.

"The man had a flute."

"But we have no flute-player."

"Then he must have been a passenger," said Dick, who hurried to the gangway.

After hailing his fireman to bring the launch alongside, he threw a quick glance about. The shore boatmen were pushing their craft abreast of the ladder and shouting as they got in each other's way, but one boat had already left the ship and was pulling fast towards the harbor. There seemed to be only one man on board besides her crew, and Dick had no doubt that he was the flute-player. He must be followed, since it was important to find out whom he met and if, as Dick suspected, he meant to send off a telegram. But the liner's captain must be warned, and Dick turned hastily around. The windlass was rattling and the bridge, on which he could see the captain's burly figure, was some distance off, while the passage between the gangway and deckhouse was blocked by the departing guests.

The anchor would probably be up before he could push his way through the crowd, and if he was not carried off to sea, he would certainly lose sight of the spy. Writing a line or two on the leaf of his pocket-book, he tore it out and held it near a Creole steward boy.

"Take that to the sobrecargo at once," he cried, and seeing the boy stoop to pick up the note, which fell to the deck, ran down the ladder.

He had, however, to wait a minute while the fireman brought the launch alongside between the other

boats, and when they pushed off Don Sebastian, scrambling across one of the craft, jumped on board. He smiled when Dick looked at him with annoyed surprise.

"I think my business is yours, but there is no time for explanations," he said. "Tell your man to go full speed."

The launch quivered and leaped ahead with the foam curling at her bows, and Dick did not look round when he heard an expostulating shout. Jake and Bethune must get ashore as they could; his errand was too important to stop for them, particularly as he could no longer see the boat in front. She had crossed the glittering belt of moonlight and vanished into the shadow near the mole. Her occupant had had some minutes' start and had probably landed, but it might be possible to find out where he had gone.

"Screw the valve wide open," Dick told the fireman.

The rattle of the engine quickened a little, the launch lifted her bows, and her stern sank into the hollow of a following wave. When she steamed up the harbor a boat lay near some steps, and as the launch slackened speed Dick asked her crew which way their passenger had gone.

"Up the mole, señor," one answered breathlessly.

"It is all you will learn from them," Don Sebastian remarked. "I think we will try the *telegrafia* first."

There was no time for questions and Dick jumped out as the launch ran alongside the steps. Don Sebastian stopped him when he reached the top.

"In Santa Brigida, nobody runs unless there is an

earthquake or a revolution. We do not want people to follow us."

Dick saw the force of this and started for the telegraph office, walking as fast as possible. When he looked round, his companion had vanished, but he rejoined him on the steps of the building. They went in together and found nobody except a languid clerk leaning on a table. Don Sebastian turned to Dick and said in English, "It will be better if you leave this matter to me."

Dick noted that the clerk suddenly became alert when he saw his companion, but he waited at a few yards' distance and Don Sebastian said: "A man came in not long since with a telegram. He was short and very dark and probably signed the form Vinoles."

"He did, señor," said the clerk.

"Very well. I want to see the message before it is sent."

"It has gone, señor, three or four minutes ago."

Don Sebastian made a gesture of resignation, spreading out his hands. "Then bring me the form."

Dick thought it significant that the clerk at once obeyed, but Don Sebastian, who stood still for a moment, turned to him.

"It is as I thought," he said in English, and ordered the clerk: "Take us into the manager's room."

The other did so, and after shutting the door withdrew. Don Sebastian threw the form on the table.

"It seems we are too late," he said.

CHAPTER XXV

THE WATER-PIPE

DICK sat down and knitted his brows as he studied his companion. Don Sebastian was a Peninsular Spaniard and in consequence of a finer type than the majority of the inhabitants of Santa Brigida. Dick, who thought he could confide in him, needed help, but the matter was delicate. In the meantime, the other waited with a smile that implied that he guessed his thoughts, until Dick, leaning forward with sudden resolution, picked up the telegram, which was written in cipher.

"This is probably a warning to somebody that the vessel will not call at the ports in the advertised order," he said.

"I imagine so. You guessed the captain's plan from what you heard outside the room?"

"Not altogether, but it gave me a hint. It looks as if you recognized me when I was standing near the lifeboat."

"I did," said Don Sebastian meaningly. "I think I showed my confidence in you."

Dick nodded, because it was plain that the other had enabled him to go away without being questioned.

"Very well; I'll tell you what I know," he said, and related how he had found the man with the flute loitering about the purser's door. As he finished, Don Sebastian got up.

"You made one mistake; you should have given your note to an Englishman and not a young Creole lad. However, we must see if the steamer can be stopped."

He led the way up a staircase to the flat roof, where Dick ran to the parapet. Looking across the town, he saw in the distance a dim white light and a long smear of smoke that trailed across the glittering sea. He frowned as he watched it, for the ship was English and he felt himself responsible for the safety of all on board her. He had done his best, when there was no time to pause and think, but perhaps he had blundered. Suppose the Creole boy had lost his note or sent it to somebody ashore?

"We are too late again," Don Sebastian remarked as he sat down on the parapet. "Well, one must be philosophical. Things do not always go as one would wish."

"Why didn't you warn the captain that his plan was found out, instead of jumping into the launch?" Dick asked angrily.

Don Sebastian smiled. "Because I did not know. I saw a man steal down the ladder and thought he might be a spy, but could not tell how much he had learned. If he had learned nothing, it would have been dangerous for the captain to change his plan again and keep to the sailing list."

"That's true," Dick agreed shortly. His chin was thrust forward and his head slightly tilted back. He looked very English and aggressive as he resumed: "But I want to know what your interest in the matter is."

"Then I must tell you. To begin with, I am em-

ployed by the Government and am in the President's confidence. The country is poor and depends for its development on foreign capital, while it is important that we should have the support and friendship of Great Britain and the United States. Perhaps you know the latter's jealousy about European interference in American affairs?"

Dick nodded. "You feel you have to be careful. But how far can a country go in harboring a belligerent's agents and supplying her fighting ships, without losing its neutrality?"

"That is a difficult question," Don Sebastian replied. "I imagine the answer depends upon the temper of the interested country's diplomatic representatives; but the President means to run no risks. We cannot, for example, have it claimed that we allowed a foreign power to buy a coaling station and use it as a base for raids on merchant ships."

"Have the Germans bought the Adexe wharf?"

Don Sebastian shrugged. "*Quién sabe?* The principal has not a German name."

"Isn't Richter German?"

"Richter has gone. It is possible that he has done his work. His friend, however, is the head of the coaling company."

"Do you think Kenwardine was his partner? If so, it's hard to understand why he let you come to his house. He's not a fool."

The Spaniard's dark eyes twinkled. "Señor Kenwardine is a clever man, and it is not always safer to keep your antagonist in the dark when you play an intricate game. Señor Kenwardine knew it would have been a mistake to show he thought I suspected

him and that he had something to conceal. We were both very frank, to a point, and now and then talked about the complications that might spring from the coaling business. Because we value our trade with England and wish to attract British capital, he knew we would not interfere with him unless we had urgent grounds, and wished to learn how far we would let him go. It must be owned that in this country official suspicion can often be disarmed."

"By a bribe? I don't think Kenwardine is rich," Dick objected.

"Then it is curious that he is able to spend so much at Adexe."

Dick frowned, for he saw what the other implied. If Kenwardine had to be supplied with money, where did it come from? It was not his business to defend the man and he must do what he could to protect British shipping, but Kenwardine was Clare's father, and he was not going to expose him until he was sure of his guilt.

"But if he was plotting anything that would get your President into trouble, he must have known he would be found out."

"Certainly. But suppose he imagined he might not be found out until he had done what he came to do? It would not matter then."

Dick said nothing. He knew he was no match for the Spaniard in subtlety, but he would not be forced into helping him. He set his lips, and Don Sebastian watched him with amusement.

"Well," said the latter, "you have my sympathy. The señorita's eyes are bright."

"I cannot have Miss Kenwardine mentioned," Dick

rejoined. "She has nothing to do with the matter."

"That is agreed," Don Sebastian answered, and leaned forward as he added in a meaning tone: "You are English and your life has been threatened by men who plot against your country. I might urge that they may try again and I could protect you; but you must see what their thinking you dangerous means. Now I want your help."

Dick's face was very resolute as he looked at him. "If any harm comes to the liner, I'll do all I can. But I'll do nothing until I know. In the meantime, can you warn the captain?"

Don Sebastian bowed. "I must be satisfied with your promise. We may find the key to the telegram, and must try to get into communication with the steamer."

They went down stairs together, but the Spaniard did not leave the office with Dick, who went out alone and found Bethune and Jake waiting at the end of the line. They bantered him about his leaving them on board the ship, but although he thought Jake looked at him curiously, he told them nothing.

When work stopped on the Saturday evening, Jake and Dick went to dine with Bethune. It was getting dark when they reached a break in the dam, where a gap had been left open while a sluice was being built. A half-finished tower rose on the other side and a rope ladder hung down for the convenience of anybody who wished to cross. A large iron pipe that carried water to a turbine, however, spanned the chasm, and the sure-footed peons often used it as a bridge. This required some agility and nerve, but it saved an awkward scramble across the sluice and up the concrete.

"There's just light enough," Jake remarked, and balancing himself carefully, walked out upon the pipe.

Dick followed and getting across safely, stopped at the foot of the tower and looked down at the rough blocks and unfinished ironwork in the bottom of the gap.

"The men have been told to use the ladder, but as they seldom do so, it would be safer to run a wire across for a hand-rail," he said. "Anybody who slipped would get a dangerous fall."

They went on to Bethune's iron shack, where Stuyvesant joined them, and after dinner sat outside, talking and smoking. A carafe of Spanish wine and some glasses stood on a table close by.

"I've fired Jose's and Pancho's gangs; they've been asking for it for some time," Stuyvesant remarked. "In fact, I'd clear out most of the shovel boys if I could replace them. They've been saving money and are getting slack."

The others agreed that it might be advisable. The half-breeds from the hills, attracted by good wages, worked well when first engaged, but generally found steady labor irksome and got discontented when they had earned a sum that would enable them to enjoy a change.

"I don't think you'd get boys enough in this neighborhood," Bethune said.

"That's so. Anyhow, I'd rather hire a less sophisticated crowd; the half-civilized *Meztiso* is worse than the other sort, but I don't see why we shouldn't look for some further along the coast. Do you feel like taking the launch, Brandon, and trying what you can do?"

"I'd enjoy the trip," Dick answered with some hesitation. "But I'd probably have to go beyond Coronal, and it might take a week."

"That won't matter; stay as long as it's necessary," Stuyvesant said, for he had noticed a slackness in Dick's movements and his tired look. "Things are going pretty well just now, and you have stuck close to your work. The change will brace you up. Anyhow, I want fresh boys and Bethune's needed here, but you can take Jake along if you want company."

Jake declared that he would go, but Dick agreed with reluctance. He felt jaded and depressed, for the double strain he had borne was beginning to tell. His work, carried on in scorching heat, demanded continuous effort, and when it stopped at night he had private troubles to grapple with. Though he had been half-prepared for Clare's refusal, it had hit him hard, and he could find no means of exposing Kenwardine's plots without involving her in his ruin. It would be a relief to get away, but he might be needed at Santa Brigida.

Bethune began to talk about the alterations a contractor wished to make, and by and by there was a patter of feet and a hum of voices in the dark. The voices grew louder and sounded angry as the steps approached the house, and Stuyvesant pushed back his chair.

"It's Jose's or Pancho's breeds come to claim that their time is wrong. I suppose one couldn't expect that kind of crowd to understand figures, but although François' accounts are seldom very plain, he's not a grafter."

Then a native servant entered hurriedly.

"They all come, señor," he announced. "Pig tief say Fransoy rob him and he go casser office window." He turned and waved his hand threateningly as a big man in ragged white clothes came into the light. "*Fuera, puerco ladron!*"

The man took off a large palm-leaf hat and flourished it with ironical courtesy.

"Here is gran escandolo, señores. *La belle chose, verdad!* Me I have trent' dollar; the grand tief me pay——"

Stuyvesant signed to the servant. "Take them round to the back corral; we can't have them on the veranda." Then he turned to Dick. "You and Bethune must convince them that the time-sheets are right; you know more about the thing than I do. Haven't you been helping François, Fuller?"

"I'm not a linguist," Jake answered with a grin. "When they talk French and Spanish at once it knocks me right off my height, as François sometimes declares."

They all went round to the back of the house, where Bethune and Dick argued with the men. The latter had been dismissed and while ready to go wanted a grievance, though some honestly failed to understand the deductions from their wages. They had drawn small sums in advance, taken goods out of store, and laid off now and then on an unusually hot day, but the amount charged against them was larger than they thought. For all that, Bethune using patience and firmness pacified them, and after a time they went away satisfied while the others returned to the veranda.

"Arguing in languages you don't know well is thirsty work, and we'd better have a drink," Bethune remarked.

He pushed the carafe across the table, but Dick picked up his glass, which he had left about half full. He was hot and it was a light Spanish wine that one could drink freely, but when he had tasted it he emptied what was left over the veranda rails.

Bethune looked surprised, but laughed. "The wine isn't very good, but the others seem able to stand for it. I once laid out a mine ditch in a neighborhood where you'd have wanted some courage to throw away a drink the boys had given you."

"It was very bad manners," Dick answered awkwardly. "Still, I didn't like the taste——"

He stopped, noticing that Jake gave him a keen glance, but Stuyvesant filled his glass and drank.

"What's the matter with the wine?" he asked.

Dick hesitated. He wanted to let the matter drop, but he had treated Bethune rudely and saw that the others were curious.

"It didn't taste as it did when I left it. Of course this may have been imagination."

"But you don't think so?" Stuyvesant rejoined. "In fact, you suspect the wine was doped after we went out?"

"No," said Dick with a puzzled frown; "I imagine any doping stuff would make it sour. The curious thing is that it tasted better than usual but stronger."

Stuyvesant picked up the glass and smelt it, for a little of the liquor remained in the bottom.

"It's a pity you threw it out, because there's a scent mine hasn't got. Like bad brandy or what the Span-

iards call *madre de vino* and use for bringing light wine up to strength."

Then Bethune took the glass from him and drained the last drops. "I think it *is madre de vino*. Pretty heady stuff and that glass would hold a lot."

Stuyvesant nodded, for it was not a wineglass but a small tumbler.

"Doping's not an unusual trick, but I can't see why anybody should want to make Brandon *drunk*."

"It isn't very plain and I may have made a fuss about nothing," Dick replied, and began to talk about something else with Jake's support.

The others indulged them, and after a time the party broke up. The moon had risen when Dick and Jake walked back along the dam, but the latter stopped when they reached the gap.

"We'll climb down and cross by the sluice instead of the pipe," he said.

"Why?" Dick asked. "The light is better than when we came."

Jake gave him a curious look. "Your nerve's pretty good, but do you want to defy your enemies and show them you have found out their trick?"

"But I haven't found it out; that is, I don't know the object of it yet."

"Well," said Jake rather grimly, "what do you think would happen if a drunken man tried to walk along that pipe?"

Then a light dawned on Dick and he sat down, feeling limp. He was abstemious, and a large dose of strong spirit would, no doubt, have unsteadied him. His companions would notice this, but with the obstinacy that often marks a half-drunk man he would

probably have insisted on trying to cross the pipe. Then a slip or hesitation would have precipitated him upon the unfinished ironwork below, and since an obvious explanation of his fall had been supplied, nobody's suspicions would have been aroused. The subtlety of the plot was unnerving. Somebody who knew all about him had chosen the moment well.

"It's so devilishly clever!" he said with hoarse anger after a moment or two.

Jake nodded. "They're smart. They knew the boys were coming to make a row and Stuyvesant wouldn't have them on the veranda. Then the wine was on the table, and anybody who'd noticed where we sat could tell your glass. It would have been easy to creep up to the shack before the moon rose."

"Who are *they?*"

"If I knew, I could tell you what to do about it, but I don't. It's possible there was only one man, but if so, he's dangerous. Anyhow, it's obvious that Kenwardine has no part in the matter."

"He's not in this," Dick agreed. "Have you a cigarette? I think I'd like a smoke. It doesn't follow that I'd have been killed, if I had fallen."

"Then you'd certainly have got hurt enough to keep you quiet for some time, which would probably satisfy the other fellow. But I don't think we'll stop here talking; there may be somebody about."

They climbed down by the foot of the tower and crossing the sluice went up the ladder. When they reached their shack Dick sat down and lighted the cigarette Jake had given him, but he said nothing and his face was sternly set. Soon afterwards he went to bed.

CHAPTER XXVI

THE LINER'S FATE

NEXT morning Dick reviewed the situation as he ate his breakfast in the fresh coolness before the sun got up. He had got a shock, but he was young and soon recovered. His anger against the unknown plotter remained fierce, but this was, in a sense, a private grievance, by which he must not be unduly influenced. It was plain that he was thought dangerous, which showed that he was following the right clue, and he had determined that the raiding of ships belonging to Britain or her allies must be stopped. Since he had gone to the representative of British authority and had been rebuffed, he meant to get Fuller to see if American suspicions could be easier aroused, but he must first make sure of his ground. In the meantime, Don Sebastian had asked his help and he had given a conditional promise.

Dick decided that he had taken the proper course. Don Sebastian held Kenwardine accountable and meant to expose him. This was painful to contemplate for Clare's sake, but Dick admitted that he could not shield Kenwardine at his country's expense. Still, the matter was horribly complicated. If Kenwardine was ruined or imprisoned, a serious obstacle in Dick's way would be removed, but it was unthinkable that this should be allowed to count when Clare must suf-

fer. Besides, she might come to hate him if she learned that he was responsible for her father's troubles. But he would make the liner's fate a test. If the vessel arrived safe, Kenwardine should go free until his guilt was certain; if she were sunk or chased, he would help Don Sebastian in every way he could.

For three or four days he heard nothing about her, and then, one hot morning, when Stuyvesant and Bethune stood at the foot of the tower by the sluice examining some plans, Jake crossed the pipe with a newspaper in his hand.

"The *Diario* has just arrived," he said. "I haven't tried to read it yet, but the liner has been attacked."

Dick, who was superintending the building of the sluice, hastily scrambled up the bank, and Stuyvesant, taking the newspaper, sat down in the shade of the tower. He knew more Castilian than the others, who gathered round him as he translated.

The liner, the account stated, had the coast in sight shortly before dark and was steaming along it when a large, black funnel steamer appeared from behind a point. The captain at once swung his vessel round and the stranger fired a shot, of which he took no notice. It was blowing fresh, the light would soon fade, and there was a group of reefs, which he knew well, not far away. The raider gained a little during the next hour and fired several shots. Two of the shells burst on board, killing a seaman and wounding some passengers, but the captain held on. When it was getting dark the reefs lay close ahead, with the sea breaking heavily on their outer edge, but he steamed boldly for an intricate, unmarked channel between them and the land. In altering his course, he exposed

the vessel's broadside to the enemy and a shot smashed the pilot-house, but they steered her in with the hand-gear. The pursuer then sheered off, but it got very dark and the vessel grounded in a position where the reef gave some shelter.

Nothing could be done until morning, but as day broke the raider reappeared and had fired a shot across the reef when a gunboat belonging to the state in whose territorial waters the steamer lay came upon the scene. She steamed towards the raider, which made off at full speed. Then the gunboat took the liner's passengers on board, and it was hoped that the vessel could be re-floated.

"A clear story, told by a French or Spanish sailor who'd taken a passage on the ship," Bethune remarked. "It certainly didn't come from one of the British crew."

"Why?" Jake asked.

Bethune smiled. "A seaman who tells the truth about anything startling that happens on board a passenger boat gets fired. The convention is to wrap the thing in mystery, if it can't be denied. Besides, the ability to take what you might call a quick, bird's-eye view isn't a British gift; an Englishman would have concentrated on some particular point. Anyhow, I can't see how the boat came to be where she was at the time mentioned." He turned to Dick and asked: "Do you know, Brandon?"

"No," said Dick, shortly, "not altogether."

"Well," resumed Bethune, "I've seen the antiquated gunboat that came to the rescue, and it's amusing to think of her steaming up to the big auxiliary cruiser. It's doubtful if they've got ammunition that

would go off in their footy little guns, though I expect the gang of half-breed cut-throats would put up a good fight. They have pluck enough, and the country they belong to can stand upon her dignity."

"She knows where to look for support," Stuyvesant remarked. "If the other party goes much farther, she'll get a sharp snub up. What's your idea of the situation?"

"Something like yours. We can't allow the black eagle to find an eyrie in this part of the world, but just now our Western bird's talons are blunt. She hasn't been rending the innocents like the other, but one or two of our former leaders are anxious to put her into fighting trim, and I dare say something of the kind will be done. However, Brandon hasn't taken much part in this conversation. I guess he's thinking about his work!"

Dick, who had been sitting quiet with a thoughtful face, got up.

"I'd like to talk to you for a few minutes, Stuyvesant."

"Very well," said the other, who turned to Bethune and Jake. "I don't want to play the domineering boss, but we're not paid to sit here and fix up international politics."

They went away and Stuyvesant looked at Dick who said, "I ought to start in the launch to-morrow to get the laborers you want, but I can't go."

"Why?"

Dick hesitated. "The fact is I've something else to do."

"Ah!" said Stuyvesant. "I think the understanding was that Fuller bought all your time."

"He did. I'm sorry, but——"

"But if I insist on your going down the coast, you'll break your agreement."

"Yes," said Dick with embarrassment. "It comes to that."

Stuyvesant looked hard at him. "You must recognize that this is a pretty good job, and you're not likely to get another without Fuller's recommendation. Then I understand you were up against it badly when he first got hold of you. You're young and ought to be ambitious, and you have your chance to make your mark right here."

"It's all true," Dick answered doggedly. "Still, I can't go."

"Then it must be something very important that makes you willing to throw up your job."

Dick did not answer and, to his surprise, Stuyvesant smiled as he resumed: "It's England first, with you?"

"How did you guess? How much do you know?" Dick asked sharply.

"I don't know very much. Your throwing out the wine gave me a hint, because it was obvious that somebody had been getting after you before, and there were other matters. But you're rather young and I suspect you're up against a big thing."

"I'm afraid I can't tell you about it yet, if that is what you mean."

"Very well. Stay here, as usual, if you like, or if you want a week off, take it. I'll find a suitable reason for not sending you in the launch."

"Thanks!" said Dick, with keen gratitude, and Stuyvesant, who nodded pleasantly, went away.

Dick sent a note to Don Sebastian by a messenger he could trust, and soon after dark met him, as he appointed, at a wine-shop on the outskirts of the town, where they were shown into a small back room.

"I imagine you are now satisfied," the Spaniard said. "The liner has been chased and people on board her have been killed."

"I'm ready to do anything that will prevent another raid. To some extent, perhaps, I'm responsible for what has happened; I might have stopped and seen the mate or captain, but then I'd have lost the man I was after. What do you think became of my note?"

Don Sebastian looked thoughtful. "The boy may have lost it or shown it to his comrades; they carry a few Spanish stewards for the sake of the foreign passengers, and we both carelessly took too much for granted. We followed the spy we saw without reflecting that there might be another on board. However, this is not important now."

"It isn't. But what do you mean to do with Kenwardine?"

"You have no cause for troubling yourself on his account."

"That's true, in a way," Dick answered, coloring, though his tone was resolute. "He once did me a serious injury, but I don't want him hurt. I mean to stop his plotting if I can, but I'm going no further, whether it's my duty or not."

The Spaniard made a sign of comprehension. "Then we need not quarrel about Kenwardine. In fact, the President does not want to arrest him; our policy is to avoid complications and it would satisfy

us if he could be forced to leave the country and give up the coaling station."

"How will you force him?"

"He has been getting letters from Kingston; ordinary, friendly letters from a gentleman whose business seems to be coaling ships. For all that, there is more in them than meets the uninstructed eye."

"Have you read his replies?"

Don Sebastian shrugged. "What do you expect? They do not tell us much, but it looks as if Señor Kenwardine means to visit Kingston soon."

"But it's in Jamaica; British territory."

"Just so," said the Spaniard, smiling. "Señor Kenwardine is a bold and clever man. His going to Kingston would have thrown us off the scent if we had not known as much as we do; but it would have been dangerous had he tried to hide it and we had found it out. You see how luck favors us?"

"What is your plan?"

"We will follow Kenwardine. He will be more or less at our mercy on British soil, and, if it seems needful, there is a charge you can bring against him. He stole some army papers."

Dick started. "How did you hear of that?"

"Clever men are sometimes incautious, and he once spoke about it to his daughter," Don Sebastian answered with a shrug. "Our antagonists are not the only people who have capable spies."

The intrigue and trickery he had become entangled in inspired Dick with disgust, but he admitted that one could not be fastidious in a fight with a man like his antagonist.

"Very well," he said, frowning, "I'll go; but it

must be understood that when he's beaten you won't decide what's to be done with the man without consulting me."

Don Sebastian bowed. "It is agreed. One can trust you to do nothing that would injure your country. But we have some arrangements to make."

Shortly afterwards Dick left the wine-shop, and returning to the camp went to see Stuyvesant.

"I want to go away in a few days, perhaps for a fortnight, but I'd like it understood that I'd been sent down the coast in the launch," he said. "As a matter of fact, I mean to start in her."

"Certainly. Arrange the thing as you like," Stuyvesant agreed. Then he looked at Dick with a twinkle. "You deserve a lay-off and I hope you'll enjoy it."

Dick thanked him and went back to his shack, where he found Jake on the verandah.

"I may go with the launch, after all, but not to Coronal," he remarked.

"Ah!" said Jake, with some dryness. "Then you had better take me; anyhow, I'm coming."

"I'd much sooner you didn't."

"That doesn't count," Jake replied. "You're getting after somebody, and if you leave me behind, I'll give the plot away. It's easy to send a rumor round the camp."

Dick reflected. He saw that Jake meant to come and knew he could be obstinate. Besides, the lad was something of a seaman and would be useful on board the launch, because Dick did not mean to join the steamer Kenwardine traveled by, but to catch another at a port some distance off.

"Well," he said, "I suppose I must give in."

"You've got to," Jake rejoined, and added in a meaning tone: "You may need a witness if you're after Kenwardine, and I want to be about to see fair play."

"Then you trust the fellow yet?"

"I don't know," Jake answered thoughtfully. "At first, I thought Kenwardine great, and I like him now. He certainly has charm and you can't believe much against him when he's with you; but it's somehow different at a distance. Still, he knew nothing about the attacks on you. I saw that when I told him about them."

"You told him!" Dick exclaimed.

"I did. Perhaps it might have been wise——"

Jake stopped, for he heard a faint rustle, as if a bush had been shaken, and Dick looked up. The moon had not yet risen, thin mist drifted out of the jungle, and it was very dark. There was some brush in front of the building and a belt of tall grass and reeds grew farther back. Without moving the upper part of his body, he put his foot under the table at which they sat and kicked Jake's leg.

"What was that about Adexe?" he asked in a clear voice, and listened hard.

He heard nothing then, for Jake took the hint and began to talk about the coaling station, but when the lad stopped there was another rustle, very faint but nearer.

Next moment a pistol shot rang out and a puff of acrid smoke drifted into the veranda. Then the brushwood crackled, as if a man had violently plunged through it, and Jake sprang to his feet.

"Come on and bring the lamp!" he shouted, running down the steps.

Dick followed, but left the lamp alone. He did not know who had fired the shot and it might be imprudent to make himself conspicuous. Jake, who was a few yards in front, boldly took a narrow path through the brush, which rose to their shoulders. The darkness was thickened by the mist, but after a moment or two they heard somebody coming to meet them. It could hardly be an enemy, because the man wore boots and his tread was quick and firm. Dick noted this with some relief, but thought it wise to take precautions.

"Hold on, Jake," he said and raised his voice: "Who's that?"

"Payne," answered the other, and they waited until he came up.

"Now," said Jake rather sharply, "what was the shooting about?"

"There was a breed hanging round in the bushes and when he tried to creep up to the veranda I plugged him."

"Then where is he?"

"That's what I don't know," Payne answered apologetically. "I hit him sure, but it looks as if he'd got away."

"It looks as if you'd missed. Where did you shoot from?"

Payne beckoned them to follow and presently stopped beside the heap of ironwork a little to one side of the shack. The lighted veranda was in full view of the spot, but there was tall brushwood close by and behind this the grass.

"I was here," Payne explained. "Heard something move once or twice, and at last the fellow showed between me and the light. When I saw he was making for the veranda I put up my gun. Knew I had the bead on him when I pulled her off."

"Then show us where he was."

Payne led them forward until they reached a spot where the brush was broken and bent, and Jake, stooping down, struck a match.

"I guess he's right. Look at this," he said with shrinking in his voice.

The others saw a red stain on the back of his hand and crimson splashes on the grass. Then Dick took the match and put it out.

"The fellow must be found. I'll get two or three of the boys I think we can trust and we'll begin the search at once."

He left them and returned presently with the men and two lanterns, but before they set off he asked Payne: "Could you hear what we said on the veranda?"

"No. I could tell you were talking, but that was all. Once you kind of raised your voice and I guess the fellow in front heard something, for it was then he got up and tried to crawl close in."

"Just so," Dick agreed and looked at Jake as one of the men lighted a lantern. "He was nearer us than Payne. I thought Adexe would draw him."

They searched the belt of grass and the edge of the jungle, since, as there were venomous snakes about, it did not seem likely that the fugitive would venture far into the thick, steamy gloom. Then they made a circuit of the camp, stopping wherever a mound of

rubbish offered a hiding-place, but the search proved useless until they reached the head of the track. Then an explanation of the man's escape was supplied, for the hand-car, which had stood there an hour ago, had gone. A few strokes of the crank would start it, after which it would run down the incline.

"I guess that's how he went," said Payne.

Dick nodded. The car would travel smoothly if its speed was controlled, but it would make some noise and he could not remember having heard anything. The peons, however, frequently used the car when they visited their comrades at the mixing sheds, and he supposed the rattle of wheels had grown so familiar that he had not noticed it.

"Send the boys away; there's nothing more to be done," he said.

They turned back towards the shack, and after a few minutes Jake remarked: "It will be a relief when this business is over. My nerves are getting ragged."

CHAPTER XXVII

THE SILVER CLASP

IT was about eleven o'clock on a hot morning and Kenwardine, who had adopted native customs, was leisurely getting his breakfast in the patio. Two or three letters lay among the fruit and wine, but he did not mean to open them yet. He was something of a sybarite and the letters might blunt his enjoyment of the well-served meal. Clare, who had not eaten much, sat opposite, watching him. His pose as he leaned back with a wineglass in his hand was negligently graceful, and his white clothes, drawn in at the waist by a black silk sash, showed his well-knit figure. There were touches of gray in his hair and wrinkles round his eyes, but in spite of this he had a look of careless youth. Clare, however, thought she noticed a hint of preoccupation that she knew and disliked.

Presently Kenwardine picked out an envelope with a British stamp from among the rest and turned it over before inserting a knife behind the flap, which yielded easily, as if the gun had lost its strength. Then he took out the letter and smiled with ironical amusement. If it had been read by any unauthorized person before it reached him, the reader would have been much misled, but it told him what he wanted to

know. There was one word an Englishman or American would not have used, though a Teuton might have done so, but Kenwardine thought a Spaniard would not notice this, even if he knew English well. The other letters were not important, and he glanced at his daughter.

Clare was not wearing well. She had lost her color and got thin. The climate was enervating, and Englishwomen who stayed in the country long felt it more than men, but this did not quite account for her jaded look.

"I am afraid you are feeling the hot weather, and perhaps you have been indoors too much," he said. "I must try to take you about more when I come back."

"Then you are going away! Where to?"

Kenwardine would have preferred to hide his destination, but since this would be difficult it seemed safer not to try and there was no reason why his household should not know.

"To Jamaica. I have some business in Kingston, but it won't keep me long."

"Can you take me?"

"I think not," said Kenwardine, who knew his visit would be attended by some risk. "For one thing, I'll be occupied all the time, and as I must get back as soon as possible, may have to travel by uncomfortable boats. You will be safe with Lucille."

"Oh, yes," Clare agreed with languid resignation. "Still, I would have liked a change."

Kenwardine showed no sign of yielding and she said nothing more. She had chosen to live with him, and although she had not known all that the choice implied,

must obey his wishes. For all that, she longed to get away. It had cost her more than she thought to refuse Dick, and she felt that something mysterious and disturbing was going on. Kenwardine's carelessness had not deceived her; she had watched him when he was off his guard and knew that he was anxious.

"You don't like Santa Brigida?" he suggested. "Well, if things go as I hope, I may soon be able to sell out my business interests and leave the country. Would that please you?"

Clare's eyes sparkled with satisfaction. Now there was a prospect of its ending, she could allow herself to admit how repugnant the life she led had grown. She had hated the gambling, and although this had stopped, the mystery and hidden intrigue that followed it were worse. If her father gave it all up, they need no longer be outcasts, and she could live as an English girl ought to do. Besides, it would be easier to forget Dick Brandon when she went away.

"Would we go back to England?" she asked eagerly.

"I hardly think that would be possible," Kenwardine replied. "We might, however, fix upon one of the quieter cities near the Atlantic coast of America. I know two or three that are not too big and are rather old-fashioned, with something of the charm of the Colonial days, where I think you might find friends that would suit your fastidious taste."

Clare tried to look content. Of late, she had longed for the peaceful, well-ordered life of the English country towns, but it seemed there was some reason they could not go home.

"Any place would be better than Santa Brigida,"

she said. "But I must leave you to your letters. I am going out to buy some things."

The sun was hot when she left the patio, but there was a strip of shade on one side of the street and she kept close to the wall, until turning a corner, she entered a blaze of light. The glare from the pavement and white houses was dazzling and she stopped awkwardly, just in time to avoid collision with a man. He stood still and she looked down as she saw that it was Dick and noted the satisfaction in his eyes.

"I'm afraid I wasn't keeping a very good lookout," he said.

"You seemed to be in a hurry," Clare rejoined, half hoping he would go on; but as he did not, she resumed: "However, you generally give one the impression of having something important to do."

Dick laughed. "That's wrong just now, because I'm killing time. I've an hour to wait before the launch is ready to go to sea."

"Then you are sailing somewhere along the coast," said Clare, who moved forward, and Dick taking her permission for granted, turned and walked by her side.

"Yes. I left Jake at the mole, putting provisions on board."

"It looks as if you would be away some time," Clare remarked carelessly.

Dick thought she was not interested and felt relieved. It had been announced at the irrigation camp that he was going to Coronal to engage workmen, in order that the report might reach Kenwardine. He had now an opportunity of sending the latter misleading news, but he could not make use of Clare in this way.

"I expect so, but can't tell yet when we will be back," he said.

"Well," said Clare, "I shall feel that I am left alone. My father is going to Kingston and doesn't know when he will return. Then you and Mr. Fuller——"

She stopped with a touch of embarrassment, wondering whether she had said too much, but Dick looked at her gravely.

"Then you will miss us?"

"Yes," she admitted with a blush. "I suppose I shall, in a sense. After all, I really know nobody in Santa Brigida; that is, nobody I like. Of course, we haven't seen either of you often, but then——"

"You liked to feel we were within call if we were wanted? Well, I wish I could put off our trip, but I'm afraid it's impossible now."

"That would be absurd," Clare answered, smiling, and they went on in silence for the next few minutes.

She felt that she had shown her feelings with raw candor, and the worst was that Dick was right. Though he thought she had robbed him, and was somehow her father's enemy, she did like to know he was near. Then there had been something curious in his tone and he had asked her nothing about her father's voyage. Indeed, it looked as if he meant to avoid the subject, although politeness demanded some remark.

"I am going shopping at the Almacen Morales," she said by and by, giving him an excuse to leave her if he wished.

"Then, if you don't mind, I'll come too. It will be out of this blazing sun, and there are a few things Jake told me to get."

It was a relief to enter the big, cool, general store, but when Clare went to the dry-goods counter Dick turned aside to make his purchases. After this, he strolled about, examining specimens of native feather-work, and was presently seized by an inspiration as he stopped beside some Spanish lace. Clare ought to wear fine lace. The intricate, gauzy web would harmonize with her delicate beauty, but the trouble was that he was no judge of the material. A little farther on, a case of silver filigree caught his eye and he turned over some of the articles. This was work he knew more about, and it was almost as light and fine as the lace. The design was good and marked by a fantastic Eastern grace, for it had come from the Canaries and the Moors had taught the Spaniards how to make it long ago. After some deliberation, Dick chose a belt-clasp in a box by itself, and the girl who had been waiting on him called a clerk.

"You have a good eye, señor," the man remarked. "The clasp was meant for a sample and not for sale."

"Making things is my business and I know when they're made well," Dick answered modestly. "Anyhow, I want the clasp."

The clerk said they would let him have it because he sometimes bought supplies for the camp, and Dick put the case in his pocket. Then he waited until Clare was ready and left the store with her. He had bought the clasp on an impulse, but now feared that she might not accept his gift. After a time, he took it out.

"This caught my eye and I thought you might wear it," he said with diffidence.

Clare took the open case, for at first the beauty of the pattern seized her attention. Then she hesitated

and turned to him with some color in her face.

"It is very pretty, but why do you want to give it to me?"

"To begin with, the thing has an airy lightness that ought to suit you. Then you took care of me and we were very good friends when I was ill. I'd like to feel I'd given you something that might remind you of this. Besides, you see, I'm going away——"

"But you are coming back."

"Yes; but things might happen in the meantime."

"What kind of things?" Clare asked in vague alarm.

"I don't know," Dick said awkwardly. "Still, disturbing things do happen. Anyhow won't you take the clasp?"

Clare stood irresolute with the case in her hand. It was strange, and to some extent embarrassing that Dick should insist upon making her the present. He had humiliated her and it was impossible that she could marry him, but there was an appeal in his eyes that was hard to deny. Besides, the clasp was beautiful and he had shown nice taste in choosing it for her.

"Very well," she said gently. "I will keep it and wear it now and then."

Dick made a sign of gratitude and they went on, but Clare stopped at the next corner and held out her hand.

"I must not take you any farther," she said firmly. "I wish you a good voyage."

She went into a shop and Dick turned back to the harbor where he boarded the launch. The boat was

loaded deep with coal, the fireman was busy, and soon after the provisions Dick had bought arrived, steam was up. He took the helm, the engine began to throb, and they glided through the cool shadow along the mole. When they met the smooth swell at the harbor mouth the sea blazed with reflected light, and Dick was glad to fix his eyes upon the little compass in the shade of the awning astern. The boat lurched away across the long undulations, with the foam curling up about her bow and rising aft in a white following wave.

"I thought of leaving the last few bags of coal," Jake remarked. "There's not much life in her and we take some chances of being washed off if she meets a breaking sea."

"It's a long run and we'll soon burn down the coal, particularly as we'll have to drive her hard to catch the Danish boat," Dick replied. "If we can do that, we'll get Kenwardine's steamer at her last port of call. It's lucky she isn't going direct to Kingston."

"You have cut things rather fine, but I suppose you worked it out from the sailing lists. The worst is that following the coast like this takes us off our course."

Dick nodded. After making some calculations with Don Sebastian's help, he had found it would be possible to catch a small Danish steamer that would take them to a port at which Kenwardine's boat would arrive shortly afterwards. But since it had been given out that he was going to Coronal, he must keep near the coast until he passed Adexe. This was necessary, because Kenwardine would not risk a visit to Jamaica,

which was British territory, if he thought he was being followed.

"We'll make it all right if the weather keeps fine," he answered.

They passed Adexe in the afternoon and boldly turned seawards across a wide bay. At sunset the coast showed faintly in the distance, obscured by the evening mist, and the land breeze began to blow. It was hot and filled with strange, sour and spicy smells, and stirred the sea into short, white ripples that rapidly got larger. They washed across the boat's half-immersed stern and now and then splashed on board at her waist; but Dick kept the engine going full speed and sat at the tiller with his eyes fixed upon the compass. It was not easy to steer by, because the lurching boat was short and the card span in erratic jerks when she began to yaw about, swerving off her course as she rose with the seas.

The night got very dark, for the land-breeze brought off a haze, but the engine lamp and glow from the furnace door threw an elusive glimmer about the craft. White sea-crests chased and caught her up, and rolling forward broke between the funnel and the bows. Water splashed on board, the engine hissed as the spray fell on it, and the floorings got wet. One could see the foam on deck wash about the headledge forward as the bows went up with a sluggishness that was the consequence of carrying an extra load of coal.

The fireman could not steer by compass, and after a time Jake took the helm from his tired companion. Dick lay down under the side deck, from which showers of brine poured close beside his head, but did not go to sleep. He was thinking of Clare and what

he must do when he met her father. It was important that they should catch Kenwardine's boat, since he must not be allowed to land and finish his business before they arrived. In the meanwhile, he listened to the measured clank of the engine, which quickened when the top blade of the screw swung out. So long as she did not lift the others she would travel well, but by and by he heard a splash in the crank-pit and called to the fireman, who started the pump.

Day broke in a blaze of fiery splendor, and the dripping launch dried. The coast was near, the sea got smooth, and the tired men were glad of the heat of the red sun. By and by the breeze died away, and the long swell heaved in a glassy calm, glittering with silver and vivid blue. When their clothes were dry they loosed and spread the awning, and a pungent smell of olive oil and coffee floated about the boat as the fireman cooked breakfast. After they had eaten, Dick moved a bag or two of coal to trim the craft and sounded the tank, because a high-pressure engine uses a large quantity of fresh water. Then he unrolled a chart and measured the distance to their port while Jake looked over his shoulder.

"We ought to be in time," he said. "The advertisement merely stated that the boat would sail to-day, but as she didn't leave the last port until yesterday and she'd have some cargo to ship, it's unlikely that she'll clear before noon."

"It might have been safer to telegraph, booking two berths. These little boats don't often miss a chance of picking up a few dollars, and the skipper would have waited."

"I thought about that; but the telegram would have

shown what we were after if Kenwardine has bribed somebody in the office, which is possible."

"You seem convinced he has had an important part in these attacks on merchant ships," Jake said thoughtfully.

"It's hard to doubt."

"The man's by way of being a friend of mine and took you into his house when you were in some danger of bleeding to death. I'm not sure that he's guilty, and now I've come with you, am going to see he gets fair play; but if you can prove your charge, you may do what you like with him. I think we'll let it go at that."

Dick nodded. "In the first place, we must make our port, and it's lucky we'll have smooth water until the sea breeze gets up."

Telling the fireman he could go to sleep, he moved about the engine with an oilcan and afterwards cleaned the fire. Then he lay on the counter with his hand on the helm while the launch sped across the glassy sea, leaving a long wake astern. The high coast ahead got clearer, but after a time dark-blue lines began to streak the glistening water and puffs of wind fanned the men's faces. The puffs were gratefully fresh and the heat felt intolerable when they passed, but by and by they settled into a steady draught and the dark lines joined, until the sea was all a glowing ultramarine. Then small ripples splashed about the launch and Dick glanced ahead.

"She's steaming well," he said as he listened to the steady snort of the exhaust and humming of the cranks. "It's lucky, because there's some weight in the wind."

Some hours later, when the sea was flecked with white, they closed with a strip of gray-green forest that seemed to run out into the water. The launch rolled and lurched as the foam-tipped combers hove her up and the awning flapped savagely in the whistling breeze. Away on the horizon, there was a dingy trail of smoke. Presently Jake stood up on deck, and watched the masts that rose above the fringe of trees.

"There's a black-top funnel like the Danish boat's, and a flag with red and white on it, but it's hanging limp. They don't feel the breeze inside."

He jumped down as Dick changed his course, and they passed a spit of surf-washed sand, rounded the last clump of trees, and opened up the harbor mouth. The sunshine fell upon a glaring white and yellow town, and oily water glittered between the wharf and the dark hulls of anchored vessels, but Dick suddenly set his lips. He knew the Danish boat, and she was not there.

"She's gone," said Jake with a hint of relief in his voice. "That was her smoke on the skyline."

CHAPTER XXVIII

ROUGH WATER

AS soon as they entered port, Dick and Jake went to the office of a Spanish shipbroker, who offered them his polite sympathy.

"We had very little cargo here, and when he heard there was some dyewood at San Ignacio the captain steamed off again," he explained.

"What sort of a port is San Ignacio, and how far is it?" Dick asked.

"It is an *aldea* on the shore of a lagoon, with a wharf that small boats can reach, about forty miles from here."

"Then they take the dyewood off in boats? If there is much of the stuff, it would be a long job."

"That is so, señor. The boats can only reach the wharf when the tide is high. At other times, the cargo must be carried down through the mud."

"Have you a large chart of this coast?"

The broker brought a chart and Dick studied it for some minutes, making notes in his pocket-book. Then he looked up.

"Where can I get fresh water?"

The broker asked how much he wanted and after taking some paper money gave him a ticket.

"There is a pipe on the wharf and when the peon sees the receipt he will fill your tanks."

Dick thanked him and going out with Jake found

their fireman asleep in a wine-shop. They had some trouble in wakening the man and after sending him off to get the water, ordered some wine. The room was dirty and filled with flies, but the lattice shutters kept out the heat and they found the shadow pleasant after the glare outside. Jake dropped into a cane chair with a sigh of content. He felt cramped and stiff after the long journey in the narrow cockpit of the plunging launch, and was sensible of an enjoyable lassitude. It would be delightful to lounge about in the shade after refreshing himself with two or three cool drinks, but he had misgivings that this was not what Dick meant to do. When he had drained a large glass of light, sweet wine, he felt peacefully at ease, and resting his head on the chair-back closed his eyes. After this he was conscious of nothing until Dick said: "It's not worth while to go to sleep."

"Not worth while?" Jake grumbled drowsily. "I was awake all last night. It's quiet and cool here and I can't stand for being broiled outside."

"I'm afraid you'll have to. We start as soon as Maccario has filled the tank."

Jake roused himself with a jerk. Dick leaned forward wearily with his elbow on the table, but he looked resolute.

"Then you haven't let up yet? You're going on to the lagoon?"

"Certainly," said Dick. "The Danish boat has an hour's start, but she only steams eight or nine knots and it will take some time to load her cargo."

"But we can't drive the launch hard. The breeze is knocking up the sea."

"We'll try," Dick answered, and Jake growled in

protest. His dream of rest and sleep, and perhaps some mildly exciting adventure when the citizens came out in the cool of the evening, had been rudely banished. Moreover, he had had another reason for being philosophical when he thought his comrade baulked.

"It's a fool trick. She won't make it if the sea gets bad."

Dick smiled dryly. "We can turn back if we find her getting swamped. It looks as if you were not very anxious to overtake Kenwardine."

"I'm not," Jake admitted. "If you're determined to go, I'm coming, but I'd be glad of a good excuse for letting the matter drop."

Somewhat to his surprise, Dick gave him a sympathetic nod. "I know; I've felt like that, but the thing can't be dropped. It's a hateful job, but it must be finished now."

"Very well," Jake answered, getting up. "If we must go, the sooner we start the better."

The launch looked very small and dirty when they looked down on her from the wharf, and Jake noted how the surf broke upon the end of the sheltering point. Its deep throbbing roar warned him what they might expect when they reached open water, but he went down the steps and helped Dick to tighten some bearing brasses, after which a peon threw down their ropes and the screw began to rattle. With a few puffs of steam from her funnel the launch moved away and presently met the broken swell at the harbor mouth. Then her easy motion changed to a drunken lurch and Jake gazed with misgivings at the white-topped seas ahead.

She went through the first comber's crest with her forefoot in the air and the foam washing deep along the tilted deck, while the counter vanished in a white upheaval. Then it swung up in turn, and frames and planking shook as the engine ran away. This happened at short intervals as she fought her way to windward in erratic jerks, while showers of spray and cinders blew aft into the face of her crew.

Dick drove her out until the sea got longer and more regular, when he turned and followed the coast, but the flashing blue and white rollers were now on her beam and flung her to lee as they passed. Sometimes one washed across her low counter, and sometimes her forward half was buried in a tumultuous rush of foam. The pump was soon started and they kept it going, but the water gathered in the crank-pit, where it was churned into lather, and Jake and Maccario relieved each other at helping the pump with a bucket. They were drenched and half blinded by the spray, but it was obvious that their labor was needed and they persevered.

Stopping for breath now and then, with his back to the wind, Jake glanced at the coast as the boat swung up with a sea. It made a hazy blur against the brilliant sky, but his eyes were smarting and dazzled. There was a confusing glitter all around him, and even the blue hollows they plunged into were filled with a luminous glow. Still he thought they made progress, though the launch was drifting to leeward fast, and he told Dick, who headed her out a point or two.

" This is not the usual sea breeze; it's blowing really

fresh," he said. "Do you think it will drop at sundown?"

"I'm not sure," Dick replied, shading his eyes as he glanced at the windward horizon.

"Then suppose it doesn't drop?"

"If the sea gets dangerous, we'll put the helm up and run for shelter."

"Where do you expect to find it?"

"I don't know," Dick admitted. "There are reefs and shoals along the coast that we might get in behind."

Jake laughed. "Well, I guess this is a pretty rash adventure. You won't turn back while you can see, and there are safer things than running for a shoal you don't know, in the dark. However, there's a point one might get a bearing from abeam and I'll try to fix our position. It might be useful later."

Stooping beside the compass, he gazed at the hazy land across its card, and then crept under the narrow foredeck with a chart. He felt the bows sweep upwards, pause for a moment, and suddenly lurch down, but now the sea was long and regular, the motion was rhythmic. Besides, the thud and gurgle of water outside the boat's thin planks were soothing and harmonized with the measured beat of the screw. Jake got drowsy and although he had meant to take another bearing when he thought he could double the angle, presently fell asleep.

It was getting dark when he awoke and crept into the cockpit. There was a change in the motion, for the launch did not roll so much and the combers no longer broke in showers of spray against her side. She swung up with a swift but easy lift, the foam boiling high about her rail, and then gently slid down

into the trough. It was plain that she was running before the wind, but Jake felt that he must pull himself together when he looked aft, for there is something strangely daunting in a big following sea. A high, white-topped ridge rolled up behind the craft, roaring as it chased her, while a stream of spray blew from its curling crest. It hid the rollers that came behind; there was nothing to be seen but a hill of water, and Jake found it a relief to fix his eyes ahead. The backs of the seas were smoother and less disturbing to watch as they faded into the gathering dark. When the comber passed, he turned to Dick, who stood, alert and highly strung, at the helm.

"You're heading for the land," he said. "What are you steering by?"

"I got the bearing of a point I thought I recognized on the chart before I lost sight of the coast. There's a long reef outshore of it, with a break near the point. If we can get through, we might find shelter."

"Suppose there's something wrong with your bearing, or you can't make good your course?"

"Then there'll be trouble," Dick answered grimly. "We'll have the reef to lee and she won't steam out again."

Jake put a kettle on the cylinder-top and took some provisions from a locker. He was hungry and thought he might need all the strength he had, while he did not want to look at the sea. The pump was clanking hard, but he could hear the water wash about under the floorings, and the launch was very wet. Darkness fell as he prepared a meal with the fireman's help, and they ate by the dim light of the engine-lamp, while Dick, to whom they handed portions, crouched at the helm, gazing close into the illuminated com-

pass. Sometimes he missed the food they held out and it dropped and was washed into the pump-well, but he ate what he could without moving his eyes.

Since he must find the opening in the reef, much depended on his steering an accurate course, but this was difficult, because he had to bear away before the largest combers. Moreover, the erratic motion of a short boat in broken water keeps the compass-card rocking to and fro, and long practise is needed to hit the mean of its oscillations. As a matter of fact, Dick knew he was leaving much to luck.

After a time, they heard a hoarse roar. Since the sound would not carry far to windward, they knew the reef was close ahead, but where the opening lay was another matter. Dick had no guide except the compass, and as the launch would probably swamp if he tried to bring her round head to sea, he must run on and take the risk. By and by, Jake, straining his eyes to pierce the gloom, called out as he saw a ghostly white glimmer to starboard. This was the surf spouting on the reef and if it marked the edge of the channel, they would be safe in going to port; if not, the launch would very shortly be hurled upon the barrier.

Dick stood up and gazed ahead. The white patch was getting plainer, but he could see nothing else. There was, however, a difference in the motion, and the sea was confused. He ordered the engine to be slowed, and they ran on until the belt of foam bore abeam. They must be almost upon the reef now, or else in the channel, and for the next minute or two nobody spoke. If they had missed the gap, the first warning would be a shock, and then the combers that rolled up behind them would destroy the stranded craft.

She did not strike; the surf was level with her quarter, and Jake, thrusting down a long boathook, found no bottom. In another minute or two the water suddenly got smooth, and he threw down the boathook.

"We're through," he said in a strained voice. "The reef's astern."

"Try the hand-lead," Dick ordered him, as he changed his course, since he was apparently heading for the beach.

Jake got four fathoms and soon afterwards eighteen feet, when Dick stopped the engine and the launch rolled upon the broken swell. A dark streak that looked like forest indicated the land, and a line of foam that glimmered with phosphorescent light ran outshore of them. Now they were to lee of the reef, the hoarse clamor of the surf rang about the boat. Unfolding the chart, they studied it by the engine-lamp. It was on too small a scale to give many details, but they saw that the reef ran roughly level with the coast and ended in a nest of shoals near a point.

"We could ride out a gale here," Jake remarked.

"We could, if we wanted," Dick replied.

Jake looked at him rather hard and then made a sign of resignation. "Well, I guess I've had enough, but if you're going on—— How do you reckon you'll get through the shoals ahead?"

"I imagine some of them are mangrove islands, and if so, there'll be a channel of a sort between them. In fact, the chart the broker showed me indicated something of the kind. With good luck we may find it."

"Very well," said Jake. "I'm glad to think it will be a soft bottom if we run aground."

They went on, keeping, so far as they could judge, midway between reef and beach, but after a time the

lead showed shoaling water and Jake used the boathook instead. Then the sky cleared and a half-moon came out, and they saw haze and the loom of trees outshore of them. Slowing the engine, they moved on cautiously while the water gradually got shallower, until glistening banks of mud began to break the surface. Then they stopped the engine, but found the launch still moved forward.

"I imagine it's about four hours' flood," Dick remarked. "That means the water will rise for some time yet, and although the current's with us now I think we can't be far off the meeting of the tides."

Jake nodded. In places of the kind, the stream often runs in from both ends until it joins and flows in one direction from the shoalest spot.

"Then we ought to find a channel leading out on the other side."

They let the engine run for a few minutes until the boat touched bottom and stuck fast in the mud. The wind seemed to be falling and the roar of the surf had got fainter. Thin haze dimmed the moonlight and there were strange splashings in the water that gently lapped about the belts of mud. The stream stopped running, but seeing no passage they waited and smoked.

"If we can get out on the other side, we oughtn't to be very far from the lagoon," Jake suggested.

Presently there was a faint rippling against the bows and the launch began to swing round.

"The tide's coming through from the other end," said Dick. "We may find a channel if we can push her across the mud."

For half an hour they laboriously poled her with a long oar and the boathook between the banks of mire.

Sometimes she touched and stuck until the rising water floated her off, and sometimes she scraped along the bottom, but still made progress. They were breathless and soaked with perspiration, while the foul scum that ran off the oar stained their damp clothes. Then Jake's boathook sank a foot or two deeper and finding the depth as good after a few vigorous pushes, they started the engine.

Sour exhalations rose from the wake of the churning screw and there was a curious dragging feel in the boat's motion, as if she were pulling a body of water after her, but this was less marked when Jake found three or four feet, and by and by he threw down the pole and they went half-speed ahead. After a time, the mangroves outshore got farther off, the air smelt fresher, and small ripples broke the surface of the widening channel. They went full-speed, the trees faded, and a swell that set her rocking met the boat, although there still seemed to be a barrier of sand or mud between her and open sea.

Giving Jake the helm, Dick crawled under the foredeck, where the floorings were drier than anywhere else, and lay smoking and thinking until day broke. The light, which grew brighter rapidly, showed a glistening line of surf to seaward and mangrove forest on a point ahead. Beyond this there seemed to be an inlet, and then the shore curved out again. As they passed the point Dick stood up on deck and presently saw too tall spars rise above the mist. A few minutes later, the top of a funnel appeared, and then a sharp metallic rattle rang through the haze.

"We're in the lagoon," he said. "That's the Danish boat and she hasn't finished heaving cargo on board."

CHAPTER XXIX

KENWARDINE TAKES A RISK

SHORTLY after the launch entered the lagoon, the Danish boat hove her anchor and steamed out to sea. Dick, who had engaged a half-breed pilot to take the launch home, lounged in a canvas chair under the poop awning. His eyes were half closed, for the white boats and deckhouses flashed dazzlingly in the strong light as the steamer lurched across the vivid swell of the Caribbean. The cigarette he languidly held had gone out, and his pose was slack.

He was physically tired and his brain was dull, but he was conscious of lethargic satisfaction. For a long time he had been torn between his love for Clare and his duty to his country. His difficulties were further complicated by doubts of Kenwardine's guilt, but recent events had cleared these up. It was, on the whole, a relief to feel that he must now go forward and there need be no more hesitation and balancing of probabilities. The time for that had gone and his course was plain. He must confront Kenwardine with a concise statement of his share in the plot and force from him an undertaking that he would abandon his traitorous work.

This might be difficult, but Dick did not think he would fail. Don Sebastian, who perhaps knew more

than he did, was to meet him at a Cuban port, and the Spaniard could be trusted to handle the matter with skill. There was no direct communication between Santa Brigida and Kingston, but steamers touched at the latter place when making a round of other ports, which would enable Dick and his ally to join Kenwardine's boat at her last call. If either of them had gone on board at Santa Brigida, Kenwardine would have left the ship at the next port.

Since he had sailed on an English steamer, bound for British territory, he would be subject to British law when they met, and they could, if needful, have him arrested. Dick admitted that this ought to be done to begin with, but had not decided about it yet. He would wait and be guided by events. The British officials might doubt his story and decline to interfere, but Kenwardine could not count on that, because Don Sebastian was armed with credentials from the President of a friendly state.

Dick, however, dismissed the matter. He was tired in mind and body, and did not mean to think of anything important until he met Kenwardine. By and by his head grew heavy, and resting it on the back of his chair, he closed his eyes. When Jake came up, followed by a steward carrying two tall glasses of frothing liquor, he saw that his comrade was fast asleep.

"You can put them down," he told the steward. "I'm thirsty enough to empty both, but you can bring some more along when my partner wakes."

After this he took a black seaman, who was making some noise as he swept the poop, by the arm and firmly led him to the other side of the deck. Then he drained

the glasses with a sigh of satisfaction, and lighting a cigarette, sat down near Dick's feet. He did not mean to sleep, but when he got up with a jerk as the lunch bell rang he saw Dick smiling.

"Have I been sitting there all this time?" he asked.

"No," said Dick. "You were lying flat on deck when I woke up an hour ago." Then he indicated the two glasses, which had rolled into the scupper channel. "I shouldn't be surprised if those accounted for it."

"Perhaps they did," Jake owned, grinning. "Anyhow, we'll have some more, with a lump of ice in it, before we go down to lunch."

The Danish boat met fine weather as she leisurely made her way across the Caribbean, and after an uneventful voyage, Dick and Jake landed at a port in Cuba. The British steamer from Santa Brigida had not arrived, but the agent expected her in the evening, and they found Don Sebastian waiting them at a hotel he had named. When it was getting dark they walked to the end of the harbor mole and sat down to watch for the vessel.

Rows of the lights began to twinkle, one behind the other, at the head of the bay, and music drifted across the water. A bright glow marked the plaza, where a band was playing, but the harbor was dark except for the glimmer of anchor-lights on the oily swell. The occasional rattle of a winch, jarring harshly on the music, told that the Danish boat was working cargo. A faint, warm breeze blew off the land, and there was a flicker of green and blue phosphorescence as the sea washed about the end of the mole.

"I wonder how you'll feel if Kenwardine doesn't

come," Jake said presently, looking at Dick, who did not answer.

"He will come," Don Sebastian rejoined with quiet confidence.

"Well, I guess he must know he's doing a dangerous thing."

"Señor Kenwardine does know, but he plays for high stakes and takes the risks of the game. If it had not been necessary, he would not have ventured on British soil, but since he was forced to go, he thought the boldest plan the safest. This is what one would expect, because the man is brave. He could not tell how far my suspicions went and how much Señor Brandon knew, but saw that he was watched and if he tried to hide his movements he would betray himself. It was wiser to act as if he had nothing to fear."

"As he was forced to go, his business must be important," Dick said thoughtfully. "This means he must be dealt with before he lands at Kingston. If we allowed him to meet his confederates there, the mischief would be done, and it might be too late afterwards to stop them carrying out their plans."

Don Sebastian gave him a quiet smile. "One might learn who his confederates are if he met them. It looks as if you would sooner deal with our friend on board."

"I would," Dick said steadily. "His plotting must be stopped, but I'm inclined to think I'd be content with that."

"And you?" the Spaniard asked, turning to Jake.

"I don't know that Kenwardine is in the worst of the plot. He was a friend of mine and it's your busi-

ness to prove him guilty. I mean to reserve my opinion until you make your charges good."

"Very well," said Don Sebastian. "We'll be guided by what happens when we see him."

They let the matter drop, and half an hour later a white light and a green light crept out of the dark to seawards, and a faint throbbing grew into the measured beat of a steamer's screw. Then a low, shadowy hull, outlined by a glimmer of phosphorescence, came on towards the harbor mouth, and a rocket swept up in a fiery curve and burst, dropping colored lights. A harsh rattle of running chain broke out, the screw splashed noisily for a few moments and stopped, and a launch came swiftly down the harbor.

"The port doctor!" said Dick. "There's some cargo ready, and she won't sail for three or four hours. We had better wait until near the last moment before we go on board. If our man saw us, he'd take alarm and land."

Don Sebastian agreed, and they went back to the hotel, and stayed there until word was sent that the last boat was ready to leave the mole. They took their places with one or two more passengers, and as they drew near the steamer Dick looked carefully about. Several shore boats were hanging on to the warp alongside and a cargo barge lay beside her quarter. It was obvious that she would not sail immediately, and if Kenwardine saw them come on board, he would have no trouble in leaving the vessel. If he landed, he would be in neutral territory, and their hold on him would be gone. To make things worse, a big electric lamp had been hung over the gangway so as to light the ladder.

Dick could not see Kenwardine among the passengers on deck, and getting on board as quietly as possible, they went down the nearest companion stairs and along an alleyway to the purser's office. A number of rooms opened on to the passage, and Dick had an uncomfortable feeling that chance might bring him face to face with Kenwardine. Nobody met them, however, and they found the purser disengaged.

"If you have a passenger list handy, you might let me see it," Dick said as he took the tickets.

The purser gave him a list, and he noted Kenwardine's name near the bottom.

"We may as well be comfortable, although we're not going far," he resumed. "What berths have you left?"

"You can pick your place," said the purser. "We haven't many passengers this trip, and there's nobody on the starboard alleyway. However, if you want a hot bath in the morning, you had better sleep to port. They've broken a pipe on the other side."

A bath is a luxury in the Caribbean, but white men who have lived any time in the tropics prefer it warm, and Dick saw why the passengers had chosen the port alleyway. He decided to take the other, since Kenwardine would then be on the opposite side of the ship.

"We'll have the starboard rooms," he said. "One can go without a bath for once, and you'll no doubt reach Kingston to-morrow night."

"I expect so," agreed the purser. "Still, we mayn't be allowed to steam in until the next morning. They're taking rather troublesome precautions in the British ports since the commerce-raider got to work."

Dick signed to the others and crossed the after well

towards the poop in a curiously grim mood. He hated the subterfuge he had practised, and there was something very repugnant in this stealthy tracking down of his man, but the chase was nearly over and he meant to finish it. Defenseless merchant seamen could not be allowed to suffer for his squeamishness.

"Don Sebastian and I will wait in the second-class smoking-room until she starts," he said to Jake. "I want you to lounge about the poop deck and watch the gangway. Let us know at once if you see Kenwardine and it looks as if he means to go ashore."

He disappeared with his companion, and Jake went up a ladder and sat down on the poop, where he was some distance from the saloon passengers. Kenwardine was less likely to be alarmed at seeing him, but he did not like his part. The man had welcomed him to his house, and although he had lost some money there, Jake did not believe his host had meant to plunder him. After all, Dick and Don Sebastian might be mistaken, and he felt mean as he watched the gangway. A hint from him would enable Kenwardine to escape, and it was galling to feel that it must not be given. Indeed, as time went on, Jake began to wish that Kenwardine would learn that they were on board and take alarm. He was not sure he would warn Dick if the fellow tried to steal away.

In the meanwhile, the pumps on board a water-boat had stopped clanking and she was towed towards the harbor. The steamer's winches rattled as they hove up cargo from the barge, but Jake had seen that there was not much left and she would sail as soon as the last load was hoisted in. Lighting a cigarette, he ran his eye along the saloon-deck. A few passengers in

white clothes walked up and down, and he studied their faces as they passed the lights, but Kenwardine was not among them. A group leaned upon the rails in the shadow of a boat, and Jake felt angry because he could not see them well. The suspense was getting keen, and he wished Kenwardine would steal down the ladder and jump into a boat before he could give the alarm.

There was, however, no suspicious movement on the saloon-deck, and Jake, walking to the rail, saw the peons putting the last of the barge's cargo into the sling. It came up with a rattle of chain, and the barge sheered off. Somebody gave an order, and there was a bustle on deck. In another few minutes Kenwardine's last chance of escape would be gone, because a British ship is British territory, and her captain can enforce his country's laws.

Jake threw away his cigarette and took out another when the whistle blew and the windlass began to clank. Although the anchor was coming up, two boats hung on to the foot of the ladder, and he could not be expected to see what was going on while he lighted his cigarette. Kenwardine was clever, and might have waited until the last moment before making his escape, with the object of leaving his pursuers on board, but if he did not go now it would be too late. The clank of the windlass stopped, and Jake, dropping the match when the flame touched his fingers, looked up. A group of dark figures were busy on the forecastle, and he saw the captain on the bridge.

"All clear forward, sir!" a hoarse voice cried, and somebody shouted: "Cast off the boats!"

Then there was a rattle of blocks as the ladder was

hoisted in, and the deck quivered as the engines began to throb. Jake heard the screw slowly flounder round and the wash beneath the poop as the steamer moved out to sea, but there was nobody except their colored crews on board the boats that dropped astern. Kenwardine had had his chance and lost it. He had been too bold and now must confront his enemies.

Jake went down the ladder and found Dick waiting at the door of the second-class saloon.

"He's on board," he said. "I'm sorry he is. In fact, I'm not sure I'd have told you if he'd tried to light out at the last moment."

Dick gave him a dry smile. "I suspect that Don Sebastian didn't trust you altogether. He left me, and I shouldn't be surprised to learn that he had found a place where he could watch the gangway without being seen."

A few minutes later, the Spaniard crossed the after well. "Now," he said, "we must decide when we ought to have our interview with Señor Kenwardine, and I think we should put it off until just before we land."

"Why?" Jake asked. "It would be much pleasanter to get it over and have done with it."

"I think not," Don Sebastian answered quietly. "We do not know how Señor Kenwardine will meet the situation. He is a bold man, and it is possible that he will defy us."

"How can he defy you when he knows you can hand him over to the British authorities?"

"That might be necessary; but I am not sure it is the British authorities he fears the most."

"Then who is he afraid of?"

"His employers, I imagine," Don Sebastian answered with a curious smile. "It is understood that they trust nobody and are not very gentle to those who do not serve them well. Señor Kenwardine knows enough about their plans to be dangerous, and it looks as if he might fail to carry their orders out. If we give him too long a warning, he may escape us after all."

"I don't see how he could escape. You have him corralled when he's under the British flag."

Don Sebastian shrugged as he indicated the steamer's low iron rail and the glimmer of foam in the dark below.

"There is one way! If he takes it, we shall learn no more than we know now."

He left them, and Jake looked at Dick. "It's unthinkable! I can't stand for it!"

"No," said Dick very quietly; "he mustn't be pushed too far. For all that, his friends can't be allowed to go on sinking British ships."

CHAPTER XXX

THE LAST ENCOUNTER

DICK awoke next morning with a feeling of nervous strain that got worse as the day wore on. By going down to the saloon immediately the breakfast-bell rang and making a hurried meal, he and his companions avoided meeting Kenwardine, and, after bribing a steward, were given lunch with the second-class passengers. Two difficulties were thus got over, but the time passed heavily while they kept out of sight in quiet corners of the after well, and Dick found it a relief when a friendly engineer invited him below. Here he spent some hours, smoking and watching the machinery, while the fingers of the clock on the bulkhead crawled with painful slowness round the dial.

When he went up on deck the bold ridge of the Blue Mountains rose above the dazzling sea, but the lower slopes were veiled in haze and he could not tell how far the land was off. A mate informed him that they would have the coast close aboard at dusk, but did not think anybody would be allowed to land until the morning. Struck by a thought, Dick asked if any passenger boats were likely to be in port, and the mate replied that a Spanish liner would leave for Brazil soon after they arrived, but he knew of no vessel going north for the next few days. Then, after giv-

ing Dick some advice about the choice of a hotel, he went away.

Towards sunset the sea-breeze dropped and the mist gathered thicker about the hills. Faint puffs of hot wind began to blow off the land, which faded suddenly as darkness rolled down. A thin haze drifted out across the water and the speed slackened as the vessel closed with the shore. Then dim lights blinked out ahead, the engines stopped, and a detonating rocket burst high up in the sky. Soon afterwards a steam launch came off, and the purser stopped near Dick on his way to his room.

"We are going in, but will have to wait until the agent gets formal permission from the guardship's commander, who must see our papers first," he said. "As this may take some time, perhaps you had better dine on board."

When the bell rang Dick and his companions went to the saloon. There were not many passengers, and the room was nearly empty, but as they entered Dick saw Kenwardine at the bottom of a table. He glanced up as he heard their footsteps, and with an abrupt movement turned his revolving chair partly round. Next moment, however, he looked at Dick coolly, and after a nod of recognition went on with his dinner. Don Sebastian indicated a table between Kenwardine and the door, and they sat down.

Jake played with his food, and Dick had not much appetite, although he partook of the dishes set before him, because he wanted an excuse for occupying the table until Kenwardine had finished. The latter showed no anxiety to get away and now and then kept the steward waiting while he studied the menu.

Dick, who envied his coolness, thought it indicated one of two things: Kenwardine knew he was beaten and was philosophically resigned, or had some plan by which he hoped to baffle his pursuers. Now and then Dick looked at Don Sebastian inquiringly, but the Spaniard answered with an enigmatic smile.

In the meantime, the passengers went away to pack or get ready for a run ashore, and at last the saloon was empty except for Dick's party and Kenwardine. Then Don Sebastian crossed the floor and bowed to the latter.

"It would be a favor if you will take a glass of wine with us," he said.

"Certainly," said Kenwardine, getting up, and Don Sebastian, who gave an order to a steward, led the way to a corner table where they would not be disturbed.

"You were, perhaps, surprised to see us, señor," he resumed, when the others joined them.

"I was," Kenwardine admitted. "Still, I suppose I ought to have been prepared for something of the kind."

Don Sebastian bowed. "One may understand that as a compliment?"

"Perhaps it is, in a sense. But I certainly did not expect to meet Mr. Fuller. We are told that his people mean to preserve a strict neutrality."

Jake colored. "I'd have stood out if you had kept your dago friends off my partner. That's what brought me in; but I'm still trying to be as neutral as I can."

"Señor Fuller has informed us that he means to see you get fair play" Don Sebastian interposed.

"Well, he has my thanks for that, and my sympathy, which I think he needs," Kenwardine rejoined with a twinkle. "There's no doubt that he owes Mr. Brandon something, and I flatter myself that he rather liked me. It must have been embarrassing to find that he couldn't be friends with both. However, you had better tell me what you want. My clothes are not packed, and I must land as soon as possible, because I have some business to transact to-night."

"I am afraid you will be unable to do so," Don Sebastian said politely.

"Why?"

"The explanation is rather long, but, to begin with, you no doubt know I was ordered to watch you."

"I must admit that I suspected something very like it."

"The President imagined you might become dangerous to the neutrality of the State, and I learned enough to show that he was right."

"What did you learn?"

Don Sebastian smiled. "I will be frank and put down my cards. I would not do so, señor, if I thought you could beat them."

He began a concise account of the discoveries he had made; showing Kenwardine's association with the German, Richter, and giving particulars about the purchase of the Adexe coaling wharf. Jake leaned forward with his elbows on the table, listening eagerly, while Dick sat motionless. Part of what he heard was new to him, but the Spaniard's statements could not be doubted, and he envied Kenwardine's nerve. The latter's face was, for the most part, inscrutable, but now and then he made a sign of languid agree-

ment, as if to admit that his antagonist had scored a point.

"Well," he said when the other finished, "it is a story that might do me harm, and there are parts I cannot deny; but it is not complete. One finds awkward breaks in it. For example, you do not show how the raider got coal and information from the Adexe Company."

"I think Señor Brandon can do so," said Don Sebastian, who turned to Dick.

Taking his cue from the Spaniard, Dick related what he had noted at the coaling wharf and learned about the movements of the tug when the auxiliary cruiser was in the neighborhood. His account to some extent filled the gaps that Don Sebastian's narrative had left, but now he came to put the different points together and consider them as a whole, their significance seemed less. He began to see how a hostile critic would look at the thing. Much of his evidence was based upon conjecture that might be denied. Yet, while it was not convincing, it carried weight.

There was a pause when he finished, and Jake was conscious of a strong revulsion of feeling as he studied his companions. In a way, the thin, dark-faced Spaniard and tranquil Englishman were alike. Both wore the stamp of breeding and were generally marked by an easy good humor and polished wit that won men's confidence and made them pleasant companions. But this was on the surface; beneath lay a character as hard and cold as a diamond. They were cunning, unscrupulous intriguers, who would stick at nothing that promised to serve their ends. Jake knew Kenwardine now, and felt angry as he remembered the in-

fatuation that had prevented his understanding the man.

Then he glanced at Dick, who sat waiting with a quietly resolute look. Dick was different from the others; he rang true. One could not doubt his rather naïve honesty, but in spite of this there was something about him that made him a match for his scheming opponent. Kenwardine, of course, had courage, but Dick was armed with a stern tenacity that made him careless of the hurt he received. Now, though he had nothing to gain and much to lose, he would hold on because duty demanded it. The contrast between them threw a lurid light upon Kenwardine's treachery.

Then the latter said: "You have stated things clearly, Brandon, but, after all, what you offer is rather plausible argument than proof. In fact, you must see that your evidence isn't strong enough."

"It's enough to justify our handing you to the military officers in Kingston, who would, no doubt, detain you while they made inquiries."

"Which you don't want to do?"

"No," said Dick shortly. "But I may be forced."

"Very well. This brings us back to the point we started from," Kenwardine replied and turned to Don Sebastian. "What is it you want?"

"To know where Richter is, and who supplied him with the money he paid for the coaling business."

"Then I'm sorry I cannot tell you, and you certainly wouldn't get the information by having me locked up, but perhaps I can meet you in another way. Now it's obvious that you know enough to make it awkward for me to carry on the Adexe wharf, and

my help is necessary for the part of the business you object to. If I retire from it altogether, you ought to be satisfied."

The Spaniard did not answer, and while he pondered, the beat of a launch's engine came in through the open ports. Kenwardine lighted a cigarette, spending some time over it, and as he finished the launch ran alongside. There were footsteps on deck, and a few moments later a steward entered the saloon.

"We are going in," he announced. "Will you have your luggage put on deck?"

"You can take ours up," said Don Sebastian, who indicated Kenwardine. "Leave this gentleman's for the present."

Kenwardine did not object, but Jake, who was watching him, thought he saw, for the first time, a hint of uneasiness in his look. Then Don Sebastian got up.

"I must think over Señor Kenwardine's suggestion, and you may want to talk to him," he said, and went out.

When he had gone, Kenwardine turned to Dick. "There's a matter I would like to clear up; I had nothing to do with the attempts that seem to have been made upon your life. In fact, I suspected nothing of the kind until you told me about the accident at the dam, but Fuller afterwards showed me that it was time to interfere."

"That's true," said Jake. "Anyhow, I gave him a plain hint, but as he didn't seem able to stop the accidents, I put Don Sebastian on the track."

"You can't with any fairness make me accountable for the actions of half-breeds who hold life very cheap

and meant to keep a paying job," Kenwardine resumed, addressing Dick. "You knew what kind of men you had to deal with and took the risk."

"It's hard to see how a white man could make use of such poisonous colored trash," Jake remarked. "But I expect you don't want me, and I'll see what Don Sebastian is doing."

He left them, and there was silence for a few moments until the screw began to throb and they heard the wash of water along the steamer's side. Then Kenwardine said quietly, "Fuller has tact. There's a matter that concerns us both that has not been mentioned yet. I'll clear the ground by stating that although our Spanish friend has not decided what he means to do, I shall not go back to Santa Brigida. I imagine this will remove an obstacle from your way."

"Thanks for the lead," Dick answered. "I resolved, some time ago, to marry Clare if she would have me, though I saw that it would mean separating her from you."

"And yet you believed she stole your papers!"

"I thought she did," Dick answered doggedly. "Still, I didn't blame her."

"You blamed me? But you ought to be satisfied, in one respect, because Clare and I are separated, and I'll own that I'm anxious about her future. Had things gone well, I would have tried to keep her away from you; in fact, I did try, because I frankly think she might have made a better marriage. For all that, if you are determined and she is willing, you have my consent. You will probably never be very rich, but I could trust Clare to you."

"I am determined."

"Very well. I can tell you something you may be glad to hear. Clare did not rob you, nor did I."

Dick looked at him with keen relief. "Then who took the plans?"

"Your cousin. The pocket they were in was unbuttoned when he took hold of you and hurried you out of the house. He brought them to me afterwards, but I saw they were not valuable and destroyed them."

It was impossible to doubt the statement, and Dick flushed with shame and anger as he realized that his absurd and unjust suspicion of Clare had prevented his seeing who the real culprit was. Clare had accidentally torn his pocket loose, the bulky envelope must have been sticking out, and Lance had noticed it as he hustled him across the hall.

"Yes; Lance took the plans!" he exclaimed hoarsely. "But why?"

"It looks as if you hadn't heard from home. Your cousin has stepped into your place. I imagine he had always envied it, and didn't hesitate when he saw an opportunity of getting rid of you."

Dick was silent for a few moments and his face was very hard. He heard the crew hurrying about the deck, and a winch rattle as the hatches were lifted. The vessel would soon be in port, and Kenwardine's fate must be decided before they went ashore; but the man looked very cool as he leaned back in his chair, languidly waiting.

"Why didn't you tell me this earlier?" Dick asked sternly.

"I should have thought my object was plain enough," Kenwardine replied. "I didn't want Clare to marry a badly paid engineer. Things are different

now and I admit that you have stood a rather severe test. I'll give you two letters; one to Clare, advising her to marry you, and the other stating how your cousin stole the plans, which you can use in any way you like. Before writing them, I'd like to see Fuller for a minute or two. You needn't hesitate about it, because I don't mean to victimize him in any way. In fact, I want to tell him something to his advantage."

Dick went out, and when he had sent Jake down, leaned upon the steamer's rail lost in thought. It had been a shock to learn of his cousin's treachery, but this was balanced by the relief of knowing that Clare was innocent. Indeed, he grew hot with shame as he wondered how he had suspected her. He felt angry with Kenwardine for keeping him in the dark so long, but his indignation was tempered by a touch of grim amusement. Since the fellow was ambitious for Clare, he must have regretted having destroyed the plans when he learned that Dick's father was rich, but after conniving at the theft he could not put matters right. Now, when his career was ended, he was willing, for his daughter's sake, to clear Dick's name and help him to regain the station he had lost. But Dick was not sure he wished to regain it just yet. He had been turned out of the army; his father, who had never shown much love for him, had been quick to believe the worst; and he was bound for a time to a man who had befriended him.

Presently he looked about. Lights were opening out in twinkling lines as the steamer moved shoreward, and a splash of oars came out of the gloom. Dick vacantly noted that several boats were approaching, and then a winch rattled and Don Sebastian, who

had come up quietly, touched his arm. A chain sling swung past beneath a moving derrick, and as they crossed the deck to get out of the way he saw a steamer close by. Her windlass was clanking as she shortened her cable and he supposed she was the Spanish boat the mate had spoken of, but he followed his companion and listened to what he had to say. Then as the anchor was let go he thought Jake ought to have come back and went to look for him. He found the lad leaning against the deckhouse, smoking a cigarette.

"Where's Kenwardine?" he asked.

"I left him in the saloon. He gave me two letters for you and a useful hint about some debts of mine."

"Never mind that! How long is it since you left him?"

"Quite five minutes," Jake answered coolly.

Struck by something in his tone, Dick ran below and found no luggage in Kenwardine's room. None of the stewards whom he asked had seen him for some time, and a hasty search showed that he was not on deck. Dick went back to Jake.

"Do you know where the fellow is?" he asked sharply as Don Sebastian came up.

"If you insist, I imagine he's on board the Spanish boat," Jake answered with a chuckle. "As she seems to have her anchor up, I guess it's too late for us to interfere."

A sharp rattle of chain that had rung across the water suddenly stopped and Dick saw one of the steamer's colored side-lights slowly move. It was plain that she was going to sea.

"Since we had been passed by the doctor, there was nothing to prevent the shore boats coming alongside,

and I believe one or two did so before we quite stopped," Jake resumed. "They were, no doubt, looking for a job, and the ladder was already lowered."

"Then you knew Kenwardine meant to steal away?"

"I didn't know, but thought it likely," Jake replied with some dryness. "On the whole, it was perhaps the best thing he could do. What's your opinion, Don Sebastian?"

The Spaniard smiled. "I think the President will be satisfied that it was the simplest way out of the difficulty."

"Well," said Jake, "here are your letters, Dick. Perhaps we had better see about getting ashore."

They moved towards the gangway, past the hatch where some heavy cases were being hoisted up, and Dick carefully put the letters in his pocket. This distracted his attention from what was going on, and when he heard a warning shout he stepped back a moment too late. A big case swung forward beneath a derrick-boom and struck his shoulder. Staggering with the blow, he lost his balance and plunged down the hatch. He was conscious of a heavy shock, a sudden, stinging pain, and then remembered nothing more.

CHAPTER XXXI

RICHTER'S MESSAGE

IT was a hot evening and Clare sat at a table in the patio, trying to read. The light was bad, for buzzing insects hovered about the lamp, but the house had not cooled down yet and she wanted to distract her troubled thoughts. Footsteps and voices rose from the street outside, where the citizens were passing on their way to the plaza, but the sounds were faint and muffled by the high walls. The house had been built in times when women were jealously guarded and a dwelling was something of a fort. Now, with the iron gate in the narrow, arched entrance barred, the girl was securely cut off from the exotic life of the city.

This isolation was sometimes a comfort, but it sometimes jarred. Clare was young, and fond of cheerful society, and the iron gate had its counterpart in another barrier, invisible but strong, that shut her out from much she would have enjoyed. She often stood, so to speak, gazing wistfully between the bars at innocent pleasures in which she could not join. Kenwardine, in spite of his polished manners, was tactfully avoided by English and Americans of the better class, and their wives and daughters openly showed their disapproval.

At length Clare gave up the attempt to read. She

felt lonely and depressed. Nobody had been to the house since Kenwardine left, and Dick and Jake were away. She did not see Dick often and he was, of course, nothing to her; for one thing, he was in some mysterious way her father's enemy. Still, she missed him; he was honest, and perhaps, if things had been different——

Then she turned her head sharply as she heard the click of a bolt. This was strange, because Lucille had locked the gate. She could not see it in the gloom of the arch, but it had certainly opened. Then as she waited with somewhat excited curiosity a dark figure appeared on the edge of the light, and she put down her book as Richter came forward. He made very little noise and stopped near the table.

"How did you get in?" she asked.

Richter smiled. "You have forgotten that Herr Kenwardine gave me a key."

"I didn't know he had," Clare answered. "But won't you sit down?"

He moved a chair to a spot where his white clothes were less conspicuous, though Clare noted that he did so carelessly and not as if he wished to hide himself. Then he put a small linen bag on the table.

"This is some money that belongs to Herr Kenwardine; you may find it useful. It is not good to be without money in a foreign town."

Clare looked at him with alarm. He was fat and generally placid, but his philosophical good humor was not so marked as usual.

"Then you have heard from my father?"

"Yes. I have a cablegram. It was sent in a roundabout way through other people's hands and

took some time to reach me. Herr Kenwardine left Kingston last night."

"But there is no boat yet."

Richter nodded. "He is not coming to Santa Brigida. I do not think that he will come back at all."

For a moment or two Clare felt unnerved, but she pulled herself together. She realized now that she had long had a vague fear that something of this kind would happen.

"Then where has he gone? Why didn't he write to me?" she asked.

"He has gone to Brazil and will, no doubt, write when he arrives. In the meantime, you must wait and tell people he is away on business. This is important. You have some money, and the house is yours for a month or two."

"But why has he gone? Will you show me the cablegram?"

"You could not understand it, and it might be better that you should not know," Richter answered. Then he paused and his manner, which had been friendly and sympathetic, changed. His short hair seemed to bristle and his eyes sparkled under his shaggy brows as he resumed: "Herr Kenwardine was forced to go at the moment he was needed most. Your father, fräulein, is a bold and clever man, but he was beaten by a blundering fool. We had confidence in him, but the luck was with his enemies."

"Who are his enemies?"

"The Englishman, Brandon, is the worst," Richter answered with keen bitterness. "We knew he was against us, but thought this something of a joke. Well, it seems we were mistaken. These English are

obstinate; often without imagination or forethought, they blunder on, and chance, that favors simpletons, is sometimes with them. But remember, that if your father meets with misfortunes, you have Brandon to thank."

The color left Clare's face, but she tried to brace herself.

"What misfortunes has my father to fear?"

Richter hesitated, and then said deprecatingly: "I cannot be as frank as I wish. Herr Kenwardine's work was most important, but he failed in it. I know this was not his fault and would trust him again, but there are others, of higher rank, who may take a different view. Besides, it will be remembered that he is an Englishman. If he stays in Brazil, I think he will be left alone, but he will get no money and some he has earned will not be sent. Indeed, if it were known, fräulein, I might be blamed for paying you this small sum, but I expect you will need it."

He got up, as if to go, but Clare stopped him.

"You will come back as soon as you know something more and tell me what to do."

Richter made an apologetic gesture. "That will be impossible. I ran some risk in coming now and leave Santa Brigida to-night in a fishing boat. You will stay in this house, as if you expect your father back, until you hear from him. He will send you instructions when he lands."

Then the kitchen door across the patio opened and a bucket clinked. Richter stepped back into the shadow and Clare looked round as an indistinct figure crossed the tiles. When she looked back Richter had

gone and she heard the splash of water. She sat still until the servant went away and then sank down limply in her chair. She was left alone and unprotected except for old Lucille, in a foreign town where morals were lax and license was the rule. The few English and Americans whose help she might have asked regarded her with suspicion, and it looked as if her father would be unable to send for her.

This was daunting but it was not the worst. Richter had vaguely hinted at Kenwardine's business, which was obviously mysterious. She saw where his hints led, but she would not follow up the clue. Her father had been ruined by Brandon, and her heart was filled with anger, in which she found it some relief to indulge. Dick had long been their enemy and thought her a thief, while the possibility that he was justified in the line he had taken made matters worse. If she was the daughter of a man dishonored by some treason against his country, she could not marry Dick. She had already refused to do so, but she did not want to be logical. It was simpler to hate him as the cause of her father's downfall. The latter had always indulged her, and now she understood that he would land in Brazil penniless, or at least impoverished. Since he was accustomed to extravagance, it was painful to think of what he might suffer.

Then she began to speculate about Richter's visit. He had come at some risk and seemed sorry for her, but he had urged her to stay in the house, as if she expected her father to return. This could be of no advantage to the latter, and she wondered whether the man had meant to make use of her to divert sus-

picion from himself and his friends. It seemed uncharitable to think so, but she was very bitter and could trust nobody.

After a time she got calm, and remembering that she had her own situation to consider, counted the money in the bag. It was not a large sum, but with economy might last for a few weeks, after which she must make some plans. She was incapable of grappling with any fresh difficulty yet, but she must brace her courage and not break down, and getting up with a resolute movement she went into the house.

On the morning after his fall, Dick came to his senses in a shaded room. He heard a shutter rattle as the warm breeze flowed in, and noted a flickering patch of light on the wall, but found with some annoyance that he could not see it well. His head was throbbing and a bandage covered part of his face. His side was painful too, and he groaned when he tried to move.

"Where am I?" he asked a strange man, who appeared beside his bed, and added in an injured tone: "It looks as if I'd got into trouble again."

"You had a narrow escape," the other answered soothingly. "You cut your head badly and broke two of your ribs when you fell down the steamer's hold. Now you're in hospital, but you're not to talk."

"I'll get worse if you keep me quiet," Dick grumbled. "How can you find out things that bother you, unless you talk?"

"Don't bother about them," said the doctor. "Have a drink instead."

Dick looked at the glass with dull suspicion. "I don't know, though I'm thirsty. You see, I've been

in a doctor's hands before. In fact, I seem to have a gift for getting hurt."

"It's cool and tastes nice," the other urged. "You didn't rest much last night and if you go to sleep now we'll try to satisfy your curiosity afterwards."

Dick hesitated, but took the glass and went to sleep soon after he drained it. When he awoke the light had vanished from the wall and the room was shadowy, but he saw Jake sitting by the bed. A nurse, who put a thermometer in his mouth and felt his pulse, nodded to the lad as if satisfied before she went away. Dick's head was clearer, and although the movement hurt him he resolutely fixed his uncovered eye on his companion.

"Now," he said, "don't tell me not to talk. Do you know why they've fixed this bandage so that it half blinds me?"

Jake looked embarrassed. "There's a pretty deep cut on your forehead."

"Do you suppose I can't feel it? But I want to know why they're not satisfied with tying my forehead up? You may as well tell me, because I'm not going to sleep again. It looks as if I'd slept all day."

"The cut runs through your eyelid and the doctor thinks it wiser to be careful."

"About my eye?"

"It's just a precaution," Jake declared. "There's really nothing the matter, but he thought it would be better to keep out the strong light."

"Ah!" said Dick, who was not deceived, and was silent for the next few moments. Then he resumed in a rather strained voice: "Well, let's talk about something else. Where's Don Sebastian?"

"I haven't seen him since lunch, but he spent the morning interviewing the British authorities."

"Do you think he told them to send after Kenwardine?"

"No," said Jake with a twinkle, "I rather think he's put them off the track, and although he had to give them a hint out of politeness, doesn't want them to know too much. Then there's only an old-fashioned cruiser here and I understand she has to stop for a guardship. In fact, Don Sebastian seems to imagine that Kenwardine is safe so long as he keeps off British soil. However, an official gentleman with a refined taste in clothes and charming manners called at our hotel and is coming to see you as soon as the doctor will let him."

Next morning Dick saw the gentleman, who stated his rank and then asked a number of questions, which Dick did not answer clearly. He was glad that his bandaged head gave him an excuse for seeming stupid. He had done his part, and now Kenwardine could do no further harm, it would be better for everybody if he got away. After a time, his visitor observed:

"Well, you seem to have rendered your country a service, and I expect you will find things made smooth for you at home after our report upon the matter has been received."

"Ah!" said Dick. "It looks as if you knew why I left."

The gentleman made a sign of assent. "Your Spanish friend was discreet, but he told us something. Besides, there are army lists and *London Gazettes* in Kingston."

Dick was silent for a few moments, and then said:

"As a matter of fact, I am not anxious to go home just yet."

"Are you not?" the other asked with a hint of polite surprise. "I do not think there would be much difficulty about a new commission, and officers are wanted."

"They're not likely to want a man with one eye, and I expect it will come to that," Dick said grimly.

His visitor was sympathetic, but left soon afterwards, and Dick thought he was not much wiser about Kenwardine's escape than when he came. Two or three weeks later he was allowed to get up, although he was tightly strapped with bandages and made to wear a shade over his eyes. When he lay in the open air one morning, Jake joined him.

"We must get back to Santa Brigida as soon as we can," he said. "They're planning an extension of the irrigation scheme, and the old man and Ida are coming out. The doctor seems to think you might go by the next boat if we take care of you. But I'd better give you Kenwardine's letters. We took them out of your pocket the night you got hurt, and I've been wondering why you haven't asked for them."

"Thanks," Dick answered dully. "I don't know that I'll use them now. I'll be glad to get back and dare say I can do my work with one eye."

"You'll soon have both," Jake declared.

"It's doubtful," said Dick. "I don't think the doctor's very sanguine."

On the whole, he was relieved when Jake left, because he found it an effort to talk, but the thoughts he afterwards indulged in were gloomy. His broken ribs did not trouble him much, but there was some

risk of his losing his eye. He had helped to expose and banish Kenwardine, and could not ask Clare to marry him after that, even if he were not half blind and disfigured. Besides, it was doubtful if he would be able to resume his profession or do any useful work again. The sight of the uninjured eye might go. As a matter of fact, the strain he had borne for some time had told upon his health and the shock of the accident had made things worse. He had sunk into a dejected, lethargic mood, from which he had not the vigor to rouse himself.

A week later he was helped on board a small French boat and sailed for Santa Brigida. He did not improve with the sea air, as Jake had hoped, and for the most part avoided the few passengers and sat alone in the darkest corner he could find. Now and then he moodily read Kenwardine's letters. He had at first expected much from them. They might have removed the stain upon his name and the greatest obstacle between himself and Clare; but he no longer cared much about the former and the letters were useless now. For all that, he put them carefully away in a leather case which he carried in an inside pocket.

CHAPTER XXXII

IDA INTERFERES

ON his return to Santa Brigida, Dick went to see a Spanish oculist, who took a more hopeful view than the Kingston doctor, although he admitted that there was some danger of the injury proving permanent. Dick felt slightly comforted when he learned that the oculist was a clever man who had been well known in Barcelona until he was forced to leave the city after taking part in some revolutionary plot. He was, however, unable to resume his work, and while he brooded over his misfortunes a touch of the malaria he had already suffered from hindered his recovery. One of the effects of malaria is a feeling of black depression. He was feebly struggling against the weakness and despondence when Fuller arrived and soon afterwards came to see him. Dick, who was sitting in the darkest corner of the veranda, had got rid of his bandage; but an ugly, livid mark crossed his forehead to the shade above his eyes and his face looked worn. Fuller talked about the dam for a time, and then stopped and looked hard at his silent companion.

"I imagined all this would interest you, but you don't say much."

"No," said Dick. "You see, it's galling to listen to plans you can't take part in. In fact, I feel I ought to resign."

"Why?"

"It looks as if it may be a long time before I can get to work and I may never be of much use again."

"Well, I suppose it's natural that you should feel badly humped, but you don't know that you'll lose your eye, and if you did, you'd do your work all right with the other. However, since you started the subject, I've something to say about our contract. If the new scheme we're negotiating goes through, as I think it will, I'll have to increase my staff. Should I do so, you'll get a move up and, of course, better pay for a more important job."

Dick, who was touched by this mark of confidence, thanked him awkwardly, and although he felt bound to object that he might be unable to fill the new post, Fuller stopped him.

"All you have to do is to lie off and take it easy until you get well. I know a useful man when I see him and it won't pay me to let you go. When I've fixed things with the President I'll make you an offer. Now Stuyvesant's waiting for me and I understand my daughter is coming to see you."

He went away and soon afterwards Ida Fuller came in. Dick rather awkwardly got her a chair, for his shade, which was closely pulled down, embarrassed him, but she noticed this, and his clumsiness made a strong appeal. She liked Dick and had some ground for being grateful to him. For half an hour she talked in a cheerful strain and Dick did his best to respond, but she saw what the effort cost and went away in a thoughtful mood.

Ida Fuller had both sympathy and self-confidence,

and when things went wrong with her friends seldom felt diffident about trying to put them right. In consequence, she took Jake away from the others, whom her father had asked to dinner that evening.

"What's the matter with Dick Brandon?" she asked.

"It's pretty obvious. His trouble began with broken ribs and may end with the loss of his eye; but if you want a list of his symptoms——"

"I don't," said Ida. "Does his trouble end with the injury to his eye?"

Jake gave her a sharp glance. "If you insist on knowing, I admit that I have my doubts. But you must remember that Dick has a touch of malaria, which makes one morbid."

"But this doesn't account for everything?"

"No," said Jake, who lighted a cigarette, "I don't think it does. In fact, as I know your capabilities and begin to see what you're getting after, there's not much use in my trying to put you off the track."

Ida sat down in a canvas chair and pondered for a minute or two.

"You know Miss Kenwardine; if I recollect, you were rather enthusiastic about her. What is she like?"

Jake's eyes twinkled. "You mean — is she good enough for Dick? He'll be a lucky man if he gets her, and I don't mind confessing that I thought of marrying her myself only she made it clear that she had no use for me. She was quite right; I'd have made a very poor match for a girl like that."

Ida was not deceived by his half-humorous manner, for she remarked something that it was meant to hide.

Still, Jake had had numerous love affairs that seldom lasted long.

"Have you been to see her since you came back?" she asked.

"Yes," said Jake. "After helping to drive her father out of the country, I knew it would be an awkward meeting, but I felt I ought to go because she might be in difficulties, and I went twice. On the whole, it was a relief when I was told she was not at home."

"I wonder whether she would see me?"

"You're pretty smart, but I suspect this is too delicate a matter for you to meddle with."

"I'll be better able to judge if you tell me what you know about it."

Jake did so with some hesitation. He knew his sister's talents and that her object was good, but he shrank from betraying his comrade's secrets.

"I think I've put you wise, but I feel rather mean," he concluded.

"What you feel is not important. But you really think he hasn't sent her Kenwardine's letter?"

Jake made a sign of agreement and Ida resumed:

"The other letter stating that his cousin stole the plans is equally valuable and his making no use of it is significant. Your partner's a white man, Jake, but he's foolish and needs the help of a judicious friend. I want both letters."

"I've warned you that it's a dangerous game. You may muss up things."

"Then I'll be responsible. Can you get the letters?"

"I think so," Jake replied with an embarrassed

grin. "In a way, it's a shabby trick, but if he will keep papers in his pocket after getting one lot stolen, he must take the consequences."

"Very well," said Ida calmly. "Now we had better go in before the others wonder why we left them."

Next morning Clare sat in the patio in very low spirits. No word had come from Kenwardine, and her money was nearly exhausted. She had heard of Dick's return, but not that he was injured, and he had kept away. This was not surprising and she did not want to meet him; but it was strange that he had not come to see her and make some excuse for what he had done. He could, of course, make none that would appease her, but he ought to have tried, and it looked as if he did not care what she thought of his treachery.

Then she glanced up as Ida came in. Clare had seen Ida in the street and knew who she was, but she studied her with keen curiosity as she advanced. Her dress was tasteful, she was pretty, and had a certain stamp of refinement and composure that Clare knew came from social training; but she felt antagonistic. For all that, she indicated a chair and waited until her visitor sat down. Then she asked with a level glance: "Why have you come to see me?"

"I expect you mean — why did I come without getting your servant to announce me?" Ida rejoined with a disarming smile. "Well, the gate was open, and I wanted to see you very much, but was half afraid you wouldn't let me in. I owe you some apology, but understand that my brother is a friend of yours."

"He was," Clare said coldly.

"Then he has lost your friendship by taking Dick Brandon's part?"

Clare colored, but her voice was firm as she answered:

"To some extent that is true. Mr. Brandon has cruelly injured us."

"He was forced. Dick Brandon is not the man to shirk his duty because it was painful and clashed with his wishes."

"Was it his duty to ruin my father?"

"He must have thought so; but we are getting on dangerous ground. I don't know much about the matter. Do you?"

Clare lowered her eyes. Since Richter's visit, she had had disturbing doubts about the nature of Kenwardine's business; but after a few moments she asked in a hard, suspicious voice: "How do you know so much about Mr. Brandon?"

"Well," said Ida calmly, "it's plain that I'm not in love with him, because if I were, I should not have tried to make his peace with you. As a matter of fact, I'm going to marry somebody else before very long. However, now I think I've cleared away a possible mistake, I'll own that I like Dick Brandon very much and am grateful to him for the care he has taken of my brother."

"He stopped Jake from coming here," Clare rejoined with a blush.

"That is so," Ida agreed. "He has done a number of other things that got him into difficulties, because he thought it right. That's the kind of man he is. Then I understand he was out of work and feeling desperate when my father engaged him, he got promotion in his employment, and I asked him to see that Jake came to no harm. I don't know if he kept

his promise too conscientiously, and you can judge better than me. But I think you ought to read the letters your father gave him."

She first put down Kenwardine's statement about the theft of the plans, and Clare was conscious of overwhelming relief as she read it. Dick knew now that she was not the thief. Then Ida said: "If you will read the next, you will see that your father doesn't feel much of a grievance against Brandon."

The note was short, but Kenwardine stated clearly that if Clare wished to marry Brandon he would be satisfied and advised her to do so. The girl's face flushed as she read and her hands trembled. Kenwardine certainly seemed to bear Dick no ill will. But since the latter had his formal consent, why had he not used it?

"Did Mr. Brandon send you with these letters?" she asked as calmly as she could.

"No, I brought them without telling him, because it seemed the best thing to do."

"You knew what they said?"

"I did," Ida admitted. "They were open."

Clare noted her confession; but she must deal with matters of much greater importance.

"Then do you know why he kept the letters back?"

Ida hesitated. If Clare were not the girl she thought, she might, by appealing to her compassion, supply her with a reason for giving Dick up, but if this happened, it would be to his advantage in the end. Still she did not think she was mistaken and she must take the risk.

"Yes," she said. "I feel that you ought to understand his reasons; that is really why I came. It looks

as if you had not heard that shortly after he met your father Dick fell down the steamer's hold."

Clare made an abrupt movement and her face got anxious. "Was he hurt?"

"Very badly. He broke two ribs and the fever he got soon afterwards stopped his getting better; but that is not the worst. One of his eyes was injured, and there is some danger that he may lose his sight."

It was plain that Clare had got a shock, for she sat in a tense attitude and the color left her face; but Ida saw that she had read her character right and taken the proper course. Indeed, she wondered whether she had not unnecessarily harrowed the girl's feelings.

"Now," she resumed, "you understand why Dick Brandon kept back the letters. It is obvious that he loves you, but he is disfigured and may have to give up his profession——"

She stopped, for Clare's face changed and her eyes shone with a gentle light.

"But what does that matter?" she exclaimed. "He can't think it would daunt me."

Ida rose, for she saw that she had said enough. "Then perhaps you had better show him that you are not afraid. If you will dine with us this evening at the dam, you will see him. Jake will come for you and bring you back."

When she left a few minutes later she had arranged for the visit, and Clare sat still, overwhelmed with compassionate gentleness and relief. Her father did not blame Dick and there was no reason she should harden her heart against him. He knew that she was innocent, but he was tied by honorable scruples. Well, since he would not come to her, she must go

to him, but she would do so with pride and not false shame. It was clear that he loved her unselfishly. By and by, however, she roused herself. As she was going to him, there were matters to think about, and entering the house she spent some time studying her wardrobe and wondering what she would wear.

That evening Dick sat on the veranda of his shack, with a shaded lamp, which he had turned low, on the table close by. His comrades were dining at Fuller's tent and he had been asked, but had made excuses although he was well enough to go. For one thing, it hurt him to sit in a strong light, though the oculist, whom he had seen in the morning, spoke encouragingly about his eye. Indeed, Dick had begun to think that there was now no real danger of its having received a permanent injury. For all that, he was listless and depressed, because he had not got rid of the fever and malaria is generally worse at night. He had been cautioned not to read and his cigarette had a bitter taste. There was nothing to do but wait until Jake came home. Now he thought of it, Jake had accepted his excuses rather easily.

By and by, he heard the lad's voice and footsteps on the path. Jake was returning early and there was somebody with him, but Dick wished they had left him alone. He rose, however, as Ida came up the steps and into the light, which did not carry far. Dick imagined there was another person as well as Jake in the shadow behind.

"Jake brought me over to see his last sketches and I'm going in to criticize them," she said. "As you couldn't come to us, I've brought you a visitor, whom you know."

Dick felt his heart beat as he saw Clare. She was dressed in white, and the silver clasp gleamed against a lavender band at her waist. It was significant that she wore it, but he could not see her face clearly. Then Ida beckoned Jake.

"Come along; I want to look at the drawings."

They went into the house, and Dick made an effort to preserve his self-control. Clare moved into the light and he saw her color rise, though her eyes were very soft.

"Why didn't you tell me you were ill?" she asked with gentle reproach.

He hesitated, trying to strengthen his resolution, which he knew was breaking down, and Clare resumed:

"Besides, I don't think you should have kept that letter back."

Dick instinctively pulled out the leather case, and started as he saw there was nothing inside.

"It's gone. You have seen it?" he stammered.

"I've seen them both," Clare answered with a smile. "Doesn't this remind you of something? I'm afraid you're careless, Dick."

The color rushed into his face. "If you have seen those letters, you know what a suspicious fool I've been."

"That doesn't matter. You're convinced at last?" Clare rejoined with a hint of pride.

"In a sense, I always was convinced. If I'd seen you take the wretched plans, I wouldn't have held you accountable. Because you took them, it couldn't have been wrong."

Clare blushed, but looked at him with shining eyes.

"I wanted to hear you say it again. But it wasn't that letter — I mean the one about the plans — that brought me."

Then the last of Dick's self-control vanished and with a half conscious movement he held out his hands. Clare came forward and next moment she was in his arms.

Some time later he felt he must be practical and said in a deprecatory tone: "But you must try to understand what you are doing, dear, and the sacrifices you must make. Things aren't quite as bad as they looked, but I can't go home just yet and may always be a poor engineer." He indicated the galvanized-iron shack. "You will have to live in a place like this, and though I think my eye will get better, there's the scar on my face——"

Clare gave him a quiet smiling glance. "That doesn't matter, Dick, and I never really had a home." She paused and added gently: "But I shall have one now."

THE END

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